

# Conrad Veidt

*From Caligari to Casablanca*

Jerry C. Allen



THE BOXWOOD PRESS  
Pacific Grove, California

© 1987, 1993

by  
Jerry C. Allen

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form  
without written permission of the copyright owner.

Distributed  
by

The Boxwood Press  
183 Ocean View Blvd.  
Pacific Grove, CA 93950  
Phone: 408-373-9110  
Fax: 408-373-0430

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Allen, J.C. (Jerry C.)

Conrad Veidt: from Caligari to Casablanca/Jerry C. Allen.—  
Centennial ed.

p. c.

Filmography: p. 347

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN: 0-940168-27-8

1. Veidt, Conrad, 1893-1943. 2. Motion picture actors and  
actresses—Germany—Biography. 3. Motion picture actors and  
actresses—Great Britain—Biography. I. Title.

PN2638.V37A63 1993

791.43'092—dc20

[B]

92-39569

CIP

## Dedication

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK to all persons who, through the years, have kept Conrad Veidt's memory alive in their minds and hearts.

*"I cannot say and I will not say  
that he is dead. He is just away!*

*With a cheery smile, and a wave of the hand,  
he has wandered into an unknown land,*

*And left us dreaming how very fair  
it needs must be, since he lingers there.*

*And you—O you, who the wildest yearn  
for an oldtime step, and the glad return*

*Think of him faring on, as dear  
in the love of There as the love of Here."*<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>Excerpt from the poem, *He is not dead*, by James Whitcomb Riley, from his book, *Away*, Bobbs-Merrill Publ. Co., 1913.





## Foreword

AS CONRAD VEIDT'S DAUGHTER, I never knew my father was an actor until I was seven years old and was permitted to see him in his current film in 1932, *The Black Hussar*. All I knew about him was that he was the most loving father in the world. He would rush home from his work at the studio to say my bedtime prayers with me, and to read me my favorite fairy tales, perhaps "The Little Mermaid" or "The Steadfast Tin Soldier." My father would then kiss me goodnight, often leaving a smudge of make-up on my cheek and my pillow. This was because he didn't want to waste any time at the studio removing the make-up, and then perhaps miss seeing me before I went to sleep, and miss saying my prayers with me.

This is just one example of his kindness and thoughtfulness, not only to me, but to so many others as well. He was a fine, caring, warm-hearted man, as well as an excellent actor. Therefore, I am happy that Jerry Allen wishes to reveal to new generations of filmgoers and cinema fans, as well as to remind members of Conrad Veidt's own generation, of the very special appeal Conrad Veidt had in his film portrayals.

I offer my sincere thanks to Mr. Allen for his untiring efforts in researching and writing this book. I also appreciate and applaud Mr. Allen's decision to enlarge and up-date his book with a profusely illustrated Second Edition to coincide with the 100th anniversary in 1993 of my father's birth. I recommend this book to all students of film history and, of course, to all fans of Conrad Veidt.

Key West, Florida  
December, 1992

Viola Veidt



## Preface to the Second Edition

SINCE THE FIRST EDITION of this book appeared in 1987, I have continued to study the life and career of Conrad Veidt. During the course of that research the following things have occurred which convinced me that a second edition of this book would be advisable. First, from my meeting with, and interview of, Viola Veidt, I have acquired much new information and more personal anecdotes, and a large number of photographs that were not available for the first edition. Many of these photographs are extremely rare because they came from the private Veidt family photo albums. Second, I have noticed a remarkable increase in interest in Veidt's life worldwide. Proof of that increased interest is manifest in the founding in 1990 of the Conrad Veidt Society, a flourishing society formed to honor Veidt's memory and to commemorate his achievements.

The final inducement to preparing this second edition is the opportunity to join with four prestigious and important institutions in their retrospective festivals in honoring Conrad Veidt in the centennial year of his birth, 1993. I refer to the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek/Internationale Filmfestspiele in Berlin; the British Film Institute, in London; La Cinematheque Francaise, in Paris, and the Museum of Modern Art, in New York.

Seaside, California

Jerry C. Allen

January 22, 1993



## Preface to the First Edition

ON APRIL 3, 1986, a few devoted fans and admirers met in a cemetery in New York City to pay their respects to one of the all-time cinema greats on the 43rd anniversary of his death. The cremated ashes of Conrad Veidt are all that remain of a legend in the theatrical world. To thousands of movie fans and students of film history all over the world, the memory of Veidt's prodigious talent and acting sincerity is still cherished many years after his untimely death at the age of fifty. On April 3, 1943, a heart attack on a Hollywood golf course ended the life and fabulous international career of this pioneer film star and character actor, who had had leading and supporting roles in more than one hundred motion pictures.

Veidt's superb poise and polished acting skill and versatility enabled him to portray almost any film role. His 6'3" height, his thin ascetic face, and piercing blue eyes made him an arresting figure. In Germany he was often billed as "The Man with the Wicked Eyes." Veidt frequently used a monocle, adding to his air of distinction. He began using a monocle in his early days in Germany and continued to sport one even after emigrating to England, after his exile from Germany. While occasionally portraying a romantic lover or a heroic or sympathetic part, Veidt excelled in villainous characterizations. Those ice-cold, steely blue eyes, and that diabolical smile and his pale, morbid face were usually enough to unnerve the most formidable member of an audience.

I have assembled and edited whatever facts and information I could learn about Veidt from research; from writing to and talking with relatives of Veidt and his associates; and from writing to and talking with students of film history in general. Two relatives of Veidt's that I talked with and corresponded with were his charming widow, Lily Veidt, and his attractive and vivacious daughter, Viola Veidt. Viola has given me encouragement in this work, and much assistance and a great deal of information about her famous father. One important associate of Veidt's that I met and talked with was Veidt's discoverer and early mentor, the noted director/producer Richard Oswald. I was extremely pleased to make his acquaintance and to ask for his assistance, which he graciously granted. He agreed with me that a new book about Conrad Veidt was

sorely needed. I was amazed at how good and clear Mr. Oswald's memory was, even though he was then at an advanced age. He could remember many of Veidt's early films, story lines, casting locations, production problems, and many other details about those golden years in Germany.

It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, at this date, to give a full synopsis of each of Veidt's one hundred-plus films, as many of his early cinematic efforts are obscure, and accurate information about them is quite rare. I have tried to make as eclectic a selection as possible of the more notable and more interesting films in which Veidt was featured, and give a brief synopsis of each, along with any additional information of possible interest about that film.

To the best of my knowledge, only two books were ever published about Veidt.\* Though well written and interesting, these books were written early in Conrad's career (1927 and 1933) and thus do not cover the latter half of Veidt's career. They were written in German, which limits their readership. I believe it is important that a new, up-to-date book be published in English about Veidt's entire career.\*

The primary purpose of this book, then, is to offer an affectionate tribute to Conrad Veidt's memory and to provide a brief glimpse into his life and work.

Seaside, California  
Spring, 1987

Jerry C. Allen

\*Early Conrad Veidt biographies: *Conrad Veidt, ein Buch vom Wesen und Werden eines Künstlers*, by Paul Ickes, 1927, Filmschriften Verlag, Berlin, Germany. *Conrad Veidt, ein Leben für den Film*, by Robert Ramin, 1933, Verlag Scherl, Berlin, Germany.

## Acknowledgments

I'M SINCERELY GRATEFUL for the assistance I received from Viola Veidt of Key West, Florida. This assistance was something I could not have obtained anywhere else. It is a continuing source of pleasure to me when I think about the private family photographs that Viola supplied as illustrations for this book—treasures that were physically handled by Conrad Veidt. I can almost see Conrad picking up the photo showing himself and his friends dunking Felicitas headfirst into the swimming pool in Beverly Hills in 1929. I can almost hear his hearty laugh as he recalls that incident and those happy days of long ago. Some of the photos were taken by Veidt himself, with his Leica camera.

I am also indebted to Richard Oswald of Hollywood, California, for the information he provided me about Conrad Veidt and about Oswald-produced early Veidt films.

My grateful thanks go to the eminent film historian, Rudolf Leutner, of Vienna, Austria, who furnished me with much hard-to-find data about Veidt's films.

To Walter Haberhauer, the founder/president of the Conrad Veidt Club, of Detmold, Germany in the 1950s, I owe sincere thanks for his generous assistance in providing me with information and photographs of Veidt.

I am also very indebted to Maralyn Kilroy, of Macclesfield, England, who not only provided me with a great deal of information and photographs of Veidt, but who also encouraged me in this project.

The following individuals provided me with much-desired personal anecdotes and other information about Conrad Veidt, as well as photographs and published articles, for which I am exceedingly grateful: Ivan J. Rado, Los Angeles, California; Mary Morris, London, England; Ernst Jaeger, Hollywood, California; Jimmy Jungermann, Munich, Germany; Lieselotte Schmandt, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Kate Houghton, Wallington, England; Vivienne Phillips, London, England; Stefan Lorant, Lenox, Massachusetts; Billy Wilder, Los Angeles, California; Heinrich Fraenkel, Thaxted, Essex, England; Friedrich Porges, Los Angeles, California.

My grateful acknowledgment is due to the following individuals, institu-

tions, and companies for the photographs, career data, and video cassettes of Veidt films which were furnished to me: Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; Staatliche Filmarchives, Berlin, Germany; British Film Institute, London, England; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Film Studios, Hollywood, California; Alexander Korda Studios, London, England; Warner Brothers Pictures, Hollywood, California; Universal Pictures, Hollywood, California; Columbia Pictures, Hollywood, California; Ross Verlag Publishing Co., Berlin, Germany; Rune Waldekranz, Stockholm, Sweden; Ingetraut Lehmann, Berlin, Germany; Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California; Richard Thorpe, Hollywood, California; Patricia Peterson, Tacoma, Washington; Gertraude Dolanski, Vienna, Austria; James Rathlesberger, Sacramento, California; M. Elizabeth Ware, Sacramento, California; Jennifer Jones, Durham, England; Patricia Battle, New York, New York.



## Contents

1. The Curtain Rises: The Opening Scene	1
2. His Early Years	4
3. Stage Career Begins	12
4. World War I and the Front Theaters	18
5. Return to Reinhardt's Theater	24
6. Entry Into Motion Pictures	30
7. Conrad's Marriage and Divorce	42
8. Conrad's First Major Film Success: "Caligari"	45
9. More Experience and Success in Films	57
10. Conrad's Second Marriage and the Birth of His Daughter	78
11. A Huge Success: "The Student of Prague"	96
12. The Veidts Visit America	102
13. The Return to Germany	129
14. Some Information About Conrad Himself	140
15. His Last German Films	156
16. Exile From Germany	180
17. A New Homeland—A New Beginning	198
18. A Prisoner of the Third Reich	208
19. A Procession of Fine British Films	216
20. More Information About Veidt and His Family	231
21. Exit Gaumont—Enter Korda	251
22. Much Gossip About Conrad: Some Truth and Many Lies	282
23. His Second Visit to America	287
24. The Final Curtain	336
25. Epilogue	343
Veidt Filmography	347
A Partial Listing of Plays from Veidt's Stage Career	355
Bibliography	360
Index	362



# 1

## The Curtain Rises: The Opening Scene

THE YEAR WAS 1893; the location was Imperial Germany. Prince Otto von Bismarck had formed the German Empire some two decades earlier. Now William II was Kaiser, an arrogant Prussian who would cause great friction, eventually war, among the leading powers of Europe. German society was stratified, with the nobility and the military at the top. Duels of honor were still commonplace.

But it was also a time of a great re-awakening of the arts. Poets, artists, writers, musicians, sculptors, dramatists, and others of an artistic bent were creating great works. The educational system in Germany was improving noticeably. However, the lot of the middle and lower classes was difficult, and there was much discontent throughout the land among the "common people" of the country. Social reforms were badly needed. The international situation was tense, with a belligerent Germany provoking the leading powers of the period (England, France, Russia, and Turkey) into an alliance of self-defense, with only Austria-Hungary allying itself with Germany. The tragedy of 1914-1918 was still some time in the future.

In this same year of 1893, across the Atlantic Ocean in the United States, Thomas Edison had perfected and patented his Kinetoscope, the ancestor of modern motion picture projection mechanisms, and this Kinetoscope was now compatible with the new and much improved celluloid film introduced by George Eastman not long before. These two inventions were the latest in a long line that evolved from human interest in the theory of "Persistence of Vision," as applied to objects in motion. The fascinating pageant of cinematography traces its roots from Leonardo da Vinci's primitive viewing chamber known as the "camera obscura" (about 1482), down to the so-called "Magic Lantern," which was introduced about 1640 by an Austrian inventor named Athanasius Kircher. Then came more modern forms of cameras and projectors, as the

art of photography evolved into the bewildering array of pseudo-scientific trade names for the early motion picture equipment of the period from 1830 to 1915. There were such names as Kinematoscope, Praxinoscope, Zoetrope, Vitascope, Mutoscope, Bioscope, Phenakistiscope, Bio-Phantascopes, Animatograph, Eidoloscope, and many others.

Motion pictures evolved from a mere novelty attraction, the "peep shows" located in penny arcades that charged only a penny for a brief glimpse of a barely moving object. One of the first "peep shows," in the early 1890s, featured Thomas Edison's filming of a man sneezing. Later in the year 1896, a famous (and quite daring for that day and age) motion picture was released by the Edison Company, entitled *The Kiss*, which starred John C. Rice and May Irwin. Other Kinetoscope favorites in the early days in America were moving pictures of two prize fighters boxing, vaudeville show routines, a strong man flexing his muscles, a trained bear act, some scantily-clad girls dancing, a sharp-shooting Annie Oakley hitting targets with a pistol and rifle, etc. For only a penny each, a patron could turn a crank and see a jerky, indistinct series of moving pictures, which lasted only about one minute.

The next stage in the evolution of the cinema was the "nickelodeon" or five-cent show. For five cents, the patron could spend an hour seated in a large room, and watch moving pictures projected onto a blank wall or a makeshift white screen. The third stage was the development of the feature film, from one to three hours long, which told a complete story. These full-length films had casts of experienced actors and were produced and directed by a burgeoning corps of expert cinema professionals.

Marvelous inventions and improvements in camera, film, projection devices, and other cinema technology, gave a vast impetus to the infant film industry. A few visionary people realized the cinema's tremendous potential, although Thomas Edison himself considered it one of his lesser inventions.

These early motion pictures that flickered so tentatively on the makeshift projectors and screens of those days sparked a revolution in entertainment that continues and evolves to this day. They developed from extremely primitive and simple viewings into exceedingly complex expressions of human art, ideas, and hopes. They created a world of fantasy and dreams for the people of the real world to enjoy.

In Europe, as in America, inventors and entrepreneurs were busy fabricating, developing, improving, and finally exhibiting their versions

of the motion picture apparatuses and products. In 1895, France had its first public demonstration in Paris by the Lumiere brothers, Louis and Auguste, of their invention, the "cinematography machine." The title and subject of their simple, brief movie was *Arrival of Train at Station*. Later, in 1902, George Melies exhibited his pioneer film, *A Trip to the Moon*, which was a sensation at that time. In London, England, simultaneously and independently, Robert A. Paul had invented his movie camera and projector, which he called a "Theatrograph," and he began exhibiting short films to excited crowds. In Germany, also in 1896, the Skladanovsky brothers, Max and Emil, made their first public performance in Berlin of their motion picture equipment, which they called a "Bioscop," showing some primitive scenes that they had shot. Later Oscar Messter began to produce and exhibit films from his small studio in Berlin.

Thus the tiny motion picture colonies of inventors, practical dreamers, showmen, and entrepreneurs in America and Europe would grow with amazing rapidity. They would soon expand into giant international cinema industries that would have great impact on the thinking and behavior of our lives, and incidentally, would affect Conrad Veidt's life immeasurably.

By the time Veidt entered into the film industry in 1917, the motion picture companies were riding a cresting tide of increased popularity, and there would be a huge demand for more films, which in turn would mean an immense demand for more actors, directors, producers, exhibitors, cameramen, script-writers, and all other personnel of the film-making ranks.

## 2

### Early Years

**I**NTO THIS MILIEU CONRAD VEIDT [pronounced as in the English word "fight"] was born on January 22, 1893, in the rear bedroom of the family apartment at #39 Tieckstrasse, in a quiet residential section of Berlin. There he would spend the first several years of his life, living the happy, carefree life of a young boy of the middle-class. Conrad (or Connie, as he preferred to be called) was the second son of Philipp Heinrich Veidt and Amalie Marie (nee Göhtz) Veidt. Conrad's only sibling, his older brother Karl, was about two years older. Conrad's paternal grandparents were Johann Conrad Veidt and Maria Elizabeth (nee Wölfinger) Veidt.

On March 26, 1893, the Veidt family's infant son was christened Hans Walter Conrad, the latter after his paternal grandfather, and the child Hans soon became known as Conrad.

Conrad and Karl often played together with the neighborhood children after school. On one occasion the group of children, while playing on the sidewalk of Tieckstrasse, became involved in a bit of mischief which resulted in minor damage to one neighbor's wooden fence. All the children began running away, scattering in all directions. Conrad, being the youngest and smallest boy, and the slowest runner, was caught by the property-owning neighbor, who escorted Conrad to #39 Tieckstrasse and turned him over to his mother. That evening Conrad received a sound spanking from his stern father. Frau Veidt then commiserated with Conrad over his pain and sorrow. Although Conrad wasn't responsible for the damage to the fence, he took his punishment and didn't snivel and whine about it.

Conrad's parents were rather opposite in nature and personality. Conrad's father was a former military man who was now the chancellery secretary in Berlin. He was a serious, stern, correct, conservative, domineering,

and somewhat forbidding gentleman who loved his wife and sons but didn't show his love openly. Conrad's mother was a gentle, sensitive, delicate, and warm-hearted woman. She loved her sons, spent as much time as she could with them, told them stories, and played games with them, and hugged them often, in between her household chores. Young Conrad resembled his mother, not only in the remarkable facial appearance but also in his personality and mannerisms.



Rare photograph taken in 1893 shows Conrad Veidt as a baby, with his parents, Philipp and Amalie Veidt.



In this rare photograph, taken in 1895 in Berlin, we see Conrad, age two-and-a-half years, with his mother.

In November 1900 Karl became ill with scarlet fever. Although Herr Veidt immediately sought out the best doctors in Berlin for his elder son, it was all to no avail. Karl died on November 17, 1900, at the age of nine. With the loss of her firstborn, Frau Veidt lavished all her love and affection on her remaining child, Conrad.

On March 5, 1908, at age 15, Conrad was confirmed in a ceremony at the Protestant Evangelical Church at Alt-Schöneberg, Berlin. Although not overly religious, Philipp Veidt was a church-going man and each Sunday he and his family attended church, and frequently attended the church's social functions as well. Conrad was always very close to his mother. When a heart attack ended her life at age fifty-six on January 17, 1922, Conrad suffered a terrible shock and loss. A few years after his mother's death, Conrad was to delight in the birth of his only child, his daughter, Vera Viola. In addition to a father's normal pleasure in the birth of his child, Conrad had a special feeling about his mother and his daughter, in that he believed that this tiny little girl was somehow, in some mystical way, a continuation of his mother's life; and he thought of himself as being the connection between his mother and the pretty little baby girl. He was to dote on his daughter for the rest of his life.

For a brief description of Conrad's early days, and his feelings about his parents, let us turn to a quotation from Veidt himself: "My father died rather early in life and I never really got to know him very well. My mother, however, was very dear to me and close to me. I can call to mind long afternoon hours, seated at her feet as a child, while she recounted to me many things about the former times. I could never hear enough of the old days in Berlin and other cities. After my father died, my mother lived on there in the old household, spending much of her time in the silent past and recalling the memories of happier days."

One pleasant memory that Conrad recalled of his childhood was one particular day when he was quite young, perhaps seven or eight years old. On that day his mother took him downtown in Berlin for shopping and recreation. They traveled from their home by horse-drawn streetcar, which was the first time by that mode of transportation for young Conrad. First, Mrs. Veidt took Conrad to the Berlin Tiergarten (zoo) where Conrad gazed in utter fascination at the wide variety of animals in cages there. They then went shopping in several stores, and among the items purchased was a new pair of shiny black shoes for Conrad. Then at noon Mrs. Veidt took her son to Aschinger's Restaurant for lunch.



Aschinger's restaurant was already an institution in Berlin then (and it is still in business today!). The restaurant was justly famous for its fine food, particularly its delectable sausages and "Berliner Erbsensuppe," a delicious, thick yellow pea soup. While leisurely eating their lunch, Mrs. Veidt told her son tales of her own childhood and of her first visit to Berlin, many years ago.

Conrad was enchanted by his mother's stories. He also relished the yellow pea soup and the unforgettably delicious sausages he was served. After lunch, Mrs. Veidt took her son to a small Kinotheater (movie theater) on the Unter den Linden, where they saw two short films. They were quite primitive movies but to young Conrad they were marvels; a bit of magic appearing before his eyes. After the film show was over, and as they traveled back home, Conrad could talk of nothing but the amazing moving pictures he had just seen for the first time.

Many years later Conrad said that for the rest of his life the memory of that wonderful day with his mother stood out in his mind like a beacon. Conrad said that the remembrance of that one day seemed to have eclipsed memories of other, more important events in his life. He stated: "I guess it was the combination of several very pleasant things happening all on one day (the trip to town by streetcar; the amazing moving pictures I had seen; the visit to the zoo; the delicious lunch; the new shoes; and most of all, being with my dear mother) that caused that day to stand out in my memory.

"In addition to the true stories my mother told me of her own childhood in Berlin, she also read wonderful fairy tales to me from a thick leatherbound book. My mother's voice was as soft as velvet and her face seemed to light up as she read me these classic children's stories.

"I can still remember the parlor of our apartment. As I listened spellbound and motionless to my mother's stories, I was sitting on a dark green, flowered cushion. In the corner an old grandfather clock was ticking away the afternoon hours. In another corner of the room there was a birdcage on a stand and in the cage was our canary, hopping up and down and chirping busily. My mother sat in a large, comfortable upholstered chair, which had antimacassars placed on the back and arms of the chair. On the mantelpiece, my father had placed several souvenirs from his military service in the German Army.

"Also among my dearest memories of my youth were the pleasant hours I spent with my mother on picnics. I was in my adolescent years

then. Immediately after school, my mother and I would take a picnic basket filled with some of my favorite snacks, and go to a park in the southwest section of Berlin, near the large, beautiful lake, the Wannsee. We would rent a boat and I would row the boat. My mother would sit in the stern seat, holding a parasol over her head, and tell me more stories of her girlhood days. Then we would eat our picnic snacks. After the refreshments, we would walk together along the lakeshore for a while. Sometimes, my mother would ask me what type of career I might want to enter, after graduation from school. I knew my father hoped I would seek a military career but that didn't appeal to me at all. I usually stammered out some sort of ambiguous answer to my mother's question. Finally, we would gather our picnic basket, parasol and coats and take the trolley back home, feeling a little guilty about enjoying ourselves so much while Papa was working at his office. I still cherish the memory of those pleasant hours I spent with my mother. My mother was the most wonderful mother a man ever had!"

My view of Conrad as a young lad growing up with his family is that of a reserved and sensitive boy, with a stern, remote and undemonstrative father and a warm and loving mother who doted on him. The cold demeanor displayed by Conrad's father was more than offset by the tender love and devotion Conrad received from his mother.

Conrad's scholastic achievements were less than sensational. For an example of this, let us refer to a report card from Conrad's high school days at the Hohenzollern School for the period of approximately Easter to September, 1912. According to this report card, Conrad's teachers graded him as Unsatisfactory in History, Latin, and in Diligence and Zeal. He was considered to be Satisfactory in Religion, French, Physics, Handwriting, and Attentiveness. His work in English, Singing and Gymnastics was graded as Good and in one classification, Behavior, Conrad received a grade of Very Good. One teacher considered Conrad's Diligence and Zeal to be insufficient to get him through his final examinations! Who could have foreseen that this mediocre pupil, who ranked thirteenth academically in a class of thirteen students, would later become a world-famous stage and screen actor and celebrity?

Here is an excerpt, in Conrad's own words, about his school days: "I was an immeasurably bad pupil. I can still see, as if it were today, how my School Master of the Fourth Form would react, when I let slip in Latin class a quite particularly stupid answer. The teacher would point his right

index finger to his forehead and temple areas, with energetic gestures. Then the whole class would laugh out loud. And in the next break period, I had two or three violent bodily encounters with the chief student laughers. But back in class again, whenever I rose from my school bench, lanky and thin and very hesitant, and began to stutter forth some nonsense from a book that interested me precious little, I was mostly greeted with laughs and derisive remarks from my schoolmates again. So most of the time, therefore, I just remained in my seat, volunteering no answers.

"On weekends, which I would spend with my parents at home, I often had a black eye or other facial injury blemish to show for my week of schooling. My only consolation was the knowledge that the other students, who had caused these injuries to me, had similar adornments, given by me, to show for their participation in the school recess-time melees."

With this dismal academic record, Conrad could not hope to go on to a university for a bachelor's degree. Or for medical training either, which had been his ambition for some time. His father had been a soldier for many years and he had risen to the rank of "Feldwebel," a non-commissioned officer in the Fuss-Artillerie Schies-Schule (The Foot Artillery Firing School) of the German Imperial Army. Predictably, Conrad's father had hoped that young Conrad would also follow a military career. But Conrad was not the least bit interested in either of his father's occupations: a military career, or the life of a civil servant, working in some dull government office. This was not for Conrad. Conrad's parents discussed his future with him, from time to time, and inquired about his work preferences, but at that time (in high school), Conrad was rather vague and uncertain. One of Conrad's teachers had said to Conrad's parents, "At any rate, he can always be an actor." This early assessment proved to be prophetic, although at the time it was not the answer Herr Philipp Veidt wanted to hear about his son.

Up to this point in his life, young Conrad had absolutely no interest in literature or the theater. Conrad *had* been interested during his early teens in becoming a doctor, after his father's life had been dramatically saved in a critical operation in 1907 by the skill of Dr. Koerthe, an eminent surgeon of that period. This tenuous ambition persisted for four years, but was quickly forgotten after Conrad took part in a high school play.

Each year Conrad's school would put on a Christmas play, and for the first time this particular year they asked Conrad to take part in the presentation. In previous years the directors of the annual plays had

assumed that a poor student like Veidt would make a poor member for the play's cast. But this year they decided to give young Veidt a chance: Not to act in the play, as such, but to deliver a lengthy prologue to the play before the curtain rose.

Conrad completed his recital very well, without any mistakes, and with a well-modulated and clear voice. The play itself, however, did not go well and there were many slip-ups during the performance. After the play was over everyone in the audience said something to the effect of "Too bad the others didn't do as well as Veidt," and they all congratulated Conrad profusely on his performance. On that very night, Conrad was bitten by the acting bug. The sincere applause of the audience and the encouragement and support of his teachers for his performance had awakened in him a strong desire to become an actor. Someday, somehow, Conrad felt that he would become one.

So it was almost by accident he chose to pursue an acting career and make the stage his life's work. With this stage goal in mind, Conrad decided to learn as much as possible about acting and stage work.

After finishing school in 1912, Conrad confided to his mother that he had hopes for a stage career. Since the Veidt family did not consider the stage a respectable career or occupation, Conrad was afraid to tell his rather stern and forbidding father of his secret hopes and ambitions. But his mother was sympathetic, encouraging, and supportive, and she would give Conrad a little money each week from her household budget. Conrad's parents were not wealthy by any means and they could ill afford the extravagance of a large allowance for Conrad. Nevertheless, Conrad's mother did manage, by scrimping here and there, and forgoing money for herself, to save a little out of each week's household money and give it to Conrad for the theater.

From then on, this meager allowance, along with the few marks Conrad earned from doing odd jobs, was spent at the box offices of Berlin theaters. There Conrad sometimes sat on the cheapest seats, the hard benches which were the highest and farthest from the stage (he couldn't afford a good seat down in center front, which cost one whole German mark). At other times, when his pocket money was especially low, he could afford no seat at all but had to stand at the rear of the theater. But whatever accommodations he had, Conrad was absolutely thrilled by the plays, and hung on each word uttered by the cast. He spent all his precious pfennigs at the theaters of Berlin, hoping to learn something of the acting

techniques, enjoying the performances of the famous actors, and trying to memorize some of the lines from the plays. He would usually come early to the theater and stay as late as was permitted.

But let Veidt describe those days in his own words: "All the time I spent in school, or at home, or working at some boring odd job—that was not Life. That was mere dull existence. My real Life began in the evening hours when I was in the Deutsches Theater. There, evening after evening, I stood, leaning on the gallery rail, with my arms wide apart, staring down at the costumed and painted actors emoting on the stage. I was absolutely bewitched by the magic of the play transpiring on the stage below me. As I watched, enraptured by these talented actors, there slowly emerged in my mind one thought, one wish, one question: Can I do such stage acting too?"

Often, after spending his meager allowance on a ticket to the theater, Conrad had no money left for a streetcar. He was forced to walk all the way home, from Berlin's west side to his home in the suburbs. On his way Conrad imagined himself playing the leading role in some great play while the audience applauded loudly. This was to be his recurring dream for the next five years, until he finally earned some acceptance as an actor in 1917.

Conrad went to many of Berlin's most popular theaters—sometimes to the Koenigliche Schauspielhaus; sometimes to the Lessing Theater, sometimes to the Deutsches Theater, often the Grosses Schauspielhaus; sometimes to Reinhardt's Olympus Theater on Schumannstrasse, or one of the many other legitimate theaters of which Berlin had a large number. But his very favorite theater was the Deutsches Theater of the great Max Reinhardt. The consensus of opinion among the Berlin drama critics of that day was that Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater was clearly the best in Berlin, and by extension, the best in all of Germany as well. The directors and actors working under Reinhardt's overall direction seemed to possess the right degree of naturalistic style and technique. As a result the Reinhardt troupe provided extraordinary "theater." One important factor contributing to the consistently high quality of the stage productions there and the first rate talent of the cast members of Reinhardt's repertory troupe was the fact that the Deutsches Theater was subsidized by the Berlin city government. Thus Reinhardt had the financial backing he needed to stage the very best productions, with the very best actors available.

# 3

## Stage Career Begins

**A**FTER MANY VISITS to the Reinhardt Theater, Conrad became acquainted with the elderly gentleman who was a combination of doorman and porter. Herr Zimmermann was a tall, dignified gentleman with a long white beard. One day in the late summer of 1912, Conrad approached the doorman and told him of his burning ambition to someday become an actor.

Herr Zimmermann did not laugh or jeer at the presumption of the callow youth but in fact tried to help him gain that objective. After conversing at length with the would-be young actor, Herr Zimmermann sensed in the youth a strong determination to be an actor and decided to refer Veidt to someone who could help him and encourage him. Herr Zimmermann introduced Conrad to Albert Blumenreich, an associate of Max Reinhardt, and suggested that Veidt attend Blumenreich's evening school for actors. This Conrad did. Blumenreich at first advised Veidt of the fee for this training, but he later accepted Veidt into his classes without pay, sensing the same determination in Veidt that Zimmermann had perceived. After the first few lessons with Veidt, Blumenreich also detected the potential to become an actor, possibly a great one. He told Veidt simply, "You can pay me later, if you wish." It was left at that. Neither Blumenreich nor Veidt ever regretted this arrangement, as Conrad later repaid Herr Blumenreich in full for the lessons and for his trust and assistance.

At this point in his life, Conrad was not a paragon of manly physique and worldly savoir-faire. But let me quote Conrad's description of himself when he was at the beginning of his long acting career: "In 1912 and 1913, as a young man of nineteen and twenty, I was too tall and too thin. I had no flesh on my bones. My legs were always getting in the way. As for my hands, they were a terrible and constant problem. They dangled out of

my sleeves, which seemed always too short. I probably looked like a gawky, gangling, callow youth newly-arrived in the big city from a farm."

However, with the considerable stage experience gained at the Deutsches Theater, Conrad soon acquired the necessary confidence and poise that enabled him to project a magnificent stage and screen presence.

After several weeks of this training, Conrad suggested to Herr Blumenreich that perhaps he was ready for an interview. Blumenreich then arranged an audition with Herr Reinhardt, who asked Veidt what he would like to recite. Veidt had learned *Faust* by heart and recited the first monologue in a flawless manner. Reinhardt was quite impressed with Veidt's recitation but said nothing directly to Veidt. Reinhardt's assistant later advised the nineteen-year-old youth that he had been accepted by Reinhardt and hired at a salary of 50 marks per month and enrolled in the famous Reinhardt stage training school. This salary was in good pre-war currency and Veidt was overjoyed at the opportunity to learn the art of the stage from so famous and gifted a teacher, and to be paid handsomely for it, to boot! This also meant that in addition to the acting lessons he would receive from Reinhardt and others, he would be allowed to play bit parts in many of Reinhardt's plays.

After Conrad was accepted by Reinhardt for the Deutsches Theater he was ecstatic. But his father's disapproval of a stage career for his son was made clear to young Conrad in a stormy session that evening. Herr Philipp Veidt, the son of good, solid, respectable middle-class parents, was less than enthused at the prospect of his son becoming an actor. He considered the stage as a complete waste of time for a young man seeking a career. He thought of theatergoers as the idle, decadent, and effete rich. Herr Veidt said to his son, "Do you know what an actor is? An actor is a gypsy, an outcast, the dregs of society. Is that what you want to be?" But Conrad was adamant and continued to study and work with Reinhardt. Conrad was able to discuss the matter with his mother and she gave him much sympathy, encouragement, and support towards his goal. Frau Veidt came to the Reinhardt Theater often to watch her son during a rehearsal or during an actual performance, even though Conrad's parts at that time were very small.

Veidt was so elated at the chance to work and learn the actor's craft from Herr Professor Reinhardt that he reportedly went out soon after this news was received and had business cards printed up for himself. The message on the card read simply: "Conrad Veidt, Member of the

Deutsches Theater." At this time this was all that he could honestly tell people. He had had no major roles as yet; he didn't even have any lines. He was just an extra in the plays. But Conrad considered himself an actor anyway. Also about this time Conrad purchased a black cape, a large tie, and an elegant hat (the type favored by artists and sculptors). Conrad wore the hat low over one eye and the combination of cape, tie, and hat gave him a distinctly Bohemian look. This was the first and only instance of vanity that I have heard of in Veidt. After he had achieved success and world fame many years later, he was less vain or conceited than he was at this early stage of his development as an actor. Years later Veidt would be amused at the conceit and ostentation and hedonistic lifestyle of the Hollywood actors and producers, as Veidt thought of himself (in his own words) as "just an actor and not anyone of importance."

In addition to the cape, the large tie and the elegant hat that he adopted at this time, Conrad also decided he needed a special badge of some sort. Something that would proclaim to the world that he was an "artiste." After considering several colorful items of apparel, and then rejecting them, Conrad decided he would adopt an accessory that would be both distinctive and useful when worn.

During his school days Conrad had met with considerable difficulty in his classroom work because he was quite near-sighted in his right eye. This affliction required the use of eyeglasses. Perhaps as an office clerk, a shoe salesman or a waiter in a restaurant the wearing of eyeglasses would present no problem to the wearer. But Conrad felt strongly that no young actor would be attractive on stage wearing a pair of eyeglasses, while a single eyeglass, or monocle, would lend him an air of distinction. And so it was that Conrad purchased, and began using, his trademark.

The first monocle Conrad bought was an elegant lens, encased in a black frame. Attached to the frame was a long, black silk ribbon which was fastened around Conrad's neck. Later on, as Conrad became more used to the monocle, he purchased a simple glass monocle with no frame or ribbon.

After many years of this habit Conrad had gotten so used to wearing his monocle that it became second nature to him. It seemed comfortable to him to have the monocle in his right eye, and it never fell out accidentally, no matter what Conrad's facial expression happened to be. Even when Conrad had heard a particularly funny story and he had burst out with one of his frequent hearty laughs, the monocle stayed firmly in place.



Conrad's first speaking part in a play was on the stage of the old Deutsches Theater in Berlin. Conrad had merely to announce the few words of German which said, "My lord awaits you!" Despite the brevity of his line, Conrad delivered it in an impressive manner and loud, clear tone. Max Reinhardt later told Veidt that he, Reinhardt, had made a mental note at that time to give this young, unknown, would-be actor a better role in the future.

One of the early Shakespearean plays that Veidt appeared in, under Max Reinhardt's meticulous direction, was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Although Veidt's role was insignificant, Veidt learned much from the direction of Reinhardt and from the performance of the other skilled and more experienced actors in the cast.

His association with Reinhardt's troupe was a tremendous opportunity for Veidt and he worked diligently to learn everything he could. The teachers were among the very best; the stage methods taught were the envy of other stage entrepreneurs; the variety of roles was extensive and the other actors were as dedicated to their craft as Veidt himself. One additional plus, an intangible asset, was the fact that Reinhardt had the rare ability to inspire his actors to enter into the mood and atmosphere of the play they were to perform, and to put forth their utmost efforts. Reinhardt was thus able to elicit splendid performances from his actors. All in all, Veidt absorbed the very finest stage training available at the time. From Reinhardt's troupe, Veidt learned such important things as elocution and diction, fencing, proper stage presence, voice projection, correct timing, stage techniques, elements of drama, and much other valuable stage training.

It was here, at Reinhardt's theater, that young Conrad learned how to speak his lines with feeling. He learned to speak the words clearly, to accent some words, and to pause, for effect, at times between sentences. He learned to shout at certain times and at other times to speak in a barely audible whisper. All of which aimed at one goal: to produce the maximum dramatic effect with one's voice, one's facial expressions, and one's gestures. Young Conrad soon realized that this career he had chosen, this wonderful fantasy world of the theater, was the life he wanted, the life he needed, the only life for him.

Max Reinhardt was considered a genius in matters of the theater and stage world. He was innovative, intuitive and a perfectionist. But he could also be ruthless, petty, excessively strict, and blunt to the point of outright

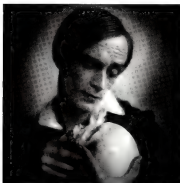


Famed theater director Max Reinhardt is shown here at his renowned Deutsches Theater in Berlin. Reinhardt was a strict teacher who expected much from his acting troupe, and usually received the utmost in the performances of his actors and actresses. In this candid photograph Reinhardt is seen vehemently exhorting his would-be actors (such as Veidt and others who later would become world famous on stage and screen) to greater efforts.

rudeness. Still, in the final analysis, Reinhardt's manner of training produced a very large number of really great actors and actresses, and a huge number of outstanding stage plays and successful theatrical productions. Reinhardt, in retrospect, was a revolutionary and inspiring stage director. He was one of the most dynamic and vital personalities in the history of the German theater.

It is generally acknowledged that many of the better German films of the 1920s and 1930s were greatly influenced by the theater work of Max Reinhardt. This applies to the stage techniques and concepts as well as the large cadre of famous film actors and actresses who began or perfected their training under Reinhardt's tutelage.

Veidt, in speaking about the relative talents of leaders of the European theater described Max Reinhardt as follows: "Max Reinhardt alone is the exception. He and he alone has properly grasped and understands the theater of our times. There proceeds from Max Reinhardt a spirit or essence in rehearsals, recitals and first nights which could flow from no other person. He so inspires the actors that many of the actors would be nothing without him. He understands actors, their life, their characteristics, their ambitions. All others are merely business people or literary men. But Reinhardt is a Director, a Theater Director!"



Veidt is seen here in the title role of Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*.

## 4

### World War I and the Front Theaters

THE YEAR 1914 was a period of many romantic attachments for Veidt. At this time of his life, Conrad was a tall, slim, and exceedingly handsome fellow. With dark hair, blue eyes, finely sculpted features, a witty sense of humor, and a charming personality, Conrad was a popular escort for many of the stage and film actresses of the day. Although most of Conrad's feminine companions were actresses, he also had no lack of adoring women, young and old, from the audiences of the theaters he played in. Many of these ladies would send perfumed notes to Conrad, containing their names, addresses, or phone numbers, and a brief invitational message. Conrad was the envy of many of the other male actors because of his almost constant amorous adventures each night after their play had finished its last performance.

Most of these romantic affairs were merely fleeting amatory encounters for Conrad. Each affair usually consisted of one or two enjoyable evenings together. But soon, these transitory affairs ended for Conrad. In early 1914, Conrad met someone who was different—someone who really meant something to him. This young woman caused Conrad to fall deeply in love—his first real love. The object of his ardent affection was a tall, dark-haired, beautiful and intelligent girl of nineteen named Lucie Mannheim. Miss Mannheim was also a member of Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater.

During their rehearsals, under Reinhardt's strict supervision, Conrad would often steal a glance at Lucie, and when their eyes met, Lucie would reward Conrad with a radiant smile. When occasionally they were separated into different rehearsal groups on stage, Conrad would seek out Lucie and press her hand as they passed by each other. He would also whisper a request for Lucie to meet him after the evening performance at a nearby cafe. At the cafe, after they had eaten their supper, they would

gaze into each other's eyes and hold hands. It became clear to Conrad that Lucie reciprocated the love he felt for her, and they promised to love each other forever.

Conrad and Lucie had a common interest in the stage, in music, in literature and art. After they left the cafe, Conrad and Lucie were happy together, sharing their love for each other, and sharing their deep interest in the art of the theater.

This idyllic period of love and happiness for Conrad and Lucie, while working together in a vocation they both enjoyed, might have continued and led to marriage but for the grave reality of the times. On June 28, 1914, an assassin's bullet had killed an Austrian archduke at Sarajevo. Declarations of war soon followed. Then rapid military mobilizations by many nations, including Germany, ensued. Before long the terrible reports of cannon and machine guns echoed over the heartland of Europe and people were dying by the thousands in World War I.

Germany had begun drafting all available able-bodied men in the appropriate age groups. Presently, Conrad was drafted and he entered the German Army on December 28, 1914. This event could have been a great setback to Conrad's stage ambitions and plans but, in the long run, it proved to be another in a series of fortunate occurrences for him.

After an emotional farewell to his parents, relatives, and friends, Conrad left Potsdam to report to his military camp. Also just before leaving for the Army, Conrad kissed Lucie goodbye and promised to return to her as soon as the hated war was over.

As Fate would have it, the two lovers were destined to meet again before the war ended. Lucie continued her work with the Reinhardt acting troupe in Berlin and Conrad began his military service. After completing his soldier's basic training, Conrad was appointed a drill instructor of recruits at Spandau (a suburb of Berlin) and not long thereafter he received a promotion to "Unterroffizier," a noncommissioned officer rank. Conrad served first with the Brandenburgische Train Abteilung No. 3 and later with the 3rd Service Squadron at Spandau.

Then on May 2, 1915, Conrad departed the safe garrison duties at Spandau with his unit, on orders for the Eastern Front. He later participated in the formidable battle for Warsaw against the Russian Army. However, during this Russian campaign, Conrad's health deteriorated badly while he was serving near Insterburg, not far behind the front lines. Conrad became terribly ill with a severe case of chills and

high fever. The doctors examined him and found that he had contracted jaundice, with an additional complication of pneumonia. He was evacuated to a hospital in Tilsit, a seaport town on the Baltic Sea coast. For a while Conrad's condition was critical but with medical care and plenty of rest he began to recover.

Conrad recuperated slowly and wasn't strong enough to return to full military duty. He was therefore placed on a light-duty status at the hospital. Conrad took good advantage of his free time in the evenings to read, study, and enjoy some of the more famous examples of world literature with books he had borrowed from the hospital library.

While still a patient at the hospital in Tilsit, Conrad was told that there was an opening for an experienced stage actor with the Front Theaters. Two of these Front Theaters were the Stadt Theater in Tilsit (directed by Kurt Grebin) and the Deutsches Theater in Libau (directed by Josef Dischner). Both of these theaters were in the Baltic Sea region, several miles behind the front lines.

During his convalescence, Conrad received a letter from Lucie, who was working then as an actress with the Front Theater in nearby Libau. Conrad was ecstatic on hearing from Lucie and the lovers were soon happily reunited when Conrad received permission to visit the Front Theater in Libau. At Lucie's suggestion, and with her help and encouragement, Conrad applied for the position of an actor with the Libau Front Theater. On his next visit to Libau, Conrad presented himself to the director of the theater there, Herr Dischner. Conrad mentioned his previous experience with the highly regarded Deutsches Theater of Berlin, directed by the world-famous impresario, Max Reinhardt. Herr Dischner requested a brief audition from Conrad, in which Conrad was asked to read the protagonist's lines from the current play at the Libau Theater. Conrad, though somewhat nervous, recited the passages from the play in a flawless manner. Herr Dischner was suitably impressed with this tall young man's stage presence, his poise, and his ability to convey considerable emotion with words and gestures. Conrad was accepted for the acting position, and upon Herr Dischner's recommendation, Conrad was released from his military duties in the hospital at Tilsit and transferred to Libau as an actor on a full-time basis.

The rationale expressed by the doctors and the military commander in Tilsit regarding Unteroffizier Veidt's case was that they felt Veidt had a weak constitution as a result of his recent bout with pneumonia. They

believed that he was unfit for full active military duty of an arduous nature. They also believed that with his stage and theatrical experience Veidt could better serve the German Army by working as an actor with the local Front Theaters. These Front Theaters provided entertainment for exhausted and wounded German soldiers back from the warfront for a few days of well-earned rest and recuperation.

This was a unique and providential opportunity for Conrad as these Front Theaters were actually outstanding stage workshops. The actors were required to enact a different play every few days. It was during this two-year period with the Front Theaters that Conrad was able to gain tremendous practical experience and a chance to apply the acting principles that he had learned so well as a student at Reinhardt's stage academy. For Veidt, this was the fulfillment of his highest hopes, since now he could play all the roles he wanted. The variety of roles and plays was immense, ranging from tragedy to comedy, from "Sitten-dramas" (plays about the customs and mores and vices of the people) to operettas. Here Veidt participated in plays by Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Ibsen, Strindberg, Schnitzler, and other world-famous playwrights, as well as in the lesser works that bordered on comedy revues and barlesque skits.



In this rare photo a group of German actors from the Libau Front Theater is shown. All are unidentified except for the smiling actor at far right—a twenty-three-year-old Conrad Veidt. The photograph was taken on September 3, 1916, in Libau, during World War I.

Although the soldiers in the audience preferred the latter, they were also given a goodly share of the former, the classical theater. Versatility was the key word for an actor with the Front Theaters of that period. During the period Conrad and Lucie were working as actors in Libau they participated in many stage plays together. Most of the plays were serious dramas. But one of these productions that was successful with the soldiers in the audience was a romantic comedy entitled *Goldfish*. On June 25, 1916, Conrad and Lucie co-starred in this comedy which was well directed by Josef Dischner. Although Conrad preferred drama to comedy, he welcomed the occasional change of pace and the experience he gained in a comic role.

Although Conrad and Lucie worked well together on stage and were inseparable for the first few weeks after their reunion at Libau, it soon became apparent to them both that something was missing in their relationship. Though they still spent long hours together each day in stage rehearsals, Conrad and Lucie realized that the spark of love that had burned so brightly in Berlin was now somewhat extinguished. Lucie decided that it would be best if she and Conrad separated. She therefore accepted an offer of an acting position with a traveling troupe of actors who made a tour of the various German war fronts. At each stop along the tour, the stage troupe would perform plays and skits for the entertainment of war-weary German soldiers. Lucie was apparently right in her decision. The separation from Conrad and her busy new schedule of traveling and acting helped her forget him. She later married another actor, Marius Goring.

The important learning process at the Front Theater continued for Conrad after Lucie's departure. He immersed himself in the art, the drama, and the stagecraft of all types of theater work. However, in late December, 1916, Conrad was ordered to the Tilsit hospital for a medical re-evaluation. At that time the military doctors examined Conrad and determined that he was unfit for further military service and released him from the Army, subject to being recalled if needed. Conrad received his final discharge from the Army on January 10, 1917.

Conrad was elated at the opportunity to leave Libau and the military life in order to return home and to the theatrical center of Germany, Berlin. As soon as Conrad learned that he would be released from the Army, he wrote a letter to Edmund Reinhardt, the energetic young brother of the noted Max, in which he requested re-admittance to the



Reinhardt troupe. Edmund Reinhardt was the business manager of the Deutsches Theater and thus ran the day-to-day business. This arrangement allowed Max Reinhardt the time and freedom to concentrate on matters artistic and theatrical. Conrad mentioned in his letter that he had been gaining additional stage experience for the past two years, working as an actor with the Front Theaters, and he enclosed letters from Herr Dischner and Herr Grebin as references.

Many years later, on being interviewed by a film magazine writer, Conrad spoke about his memories of his early days with the German Front Theaters in 1915-17. Conrad stated: "Josef Dischner was the director of the Front Theater in Libau then. Herr Dischner was a fine, understanding man and a remarkable stage director. He not only permitted me to participate often in stage productions, but he encouraged me to do as much theatrical work as possible. He gave me the opportunity to perform in a wide variety of plays—from tragedies to comedies; from supporting roles to leading actor parts. On occasion, Herr Dischner even arranged for me to travel over to the other Front Theater in the area, the Stadt-Theater in Tilsit, with the concurrence of Herr Grebin, the director there. This was done to allow me to perform in a highly desirable dramatic role in a special classic tragedy being produced there.

"In this way, Herr Dischner gave me the one thing I needed most—a solid grounding in the basic craft of the theater and the experience that goes with it. I still think often of Herr Dischner with affection and gratitude for the invaluable stage experience he gave me. His small theater produced uncommonly fine theatrical entertainment. But because I had this burning ambition, I wasn't satisfied with Libau. I wanted to return to Berlin and to Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater, probably the greatest theater in Germany. That was my dream. And Josef Dischner and his theatrical troupe helped me reach my goal, my dream."

## 5

### Return to Reinhardt's Theater

CONRAD WAS OVERJOYED when a reply came back to him from Edmund Reinhardt, stating that the Reinhardts wanted him back. Conrad was well aware that being a Reinhardt Theater actor was the greatest honor and opportunity for which any European actor could hope. With their acceptance, the Army discharge certificate in his pocket and a pitifully small hoard of currency in his wallet, Conrad boarded the train and went directly back to Berlin from Libau, and resided once more at the Veidt family residence on Tieckstrasse. Philipp and Amalie Veidt were ecstatic to see their son again at a time when so many young German men were dying in the two-front war.

To Conrad's amused surprise and delight, his father no longer gave him the customary angry lectures on the folly of a career on the stage. Herr Veidt was so glad to see his only remaining son alive and home again from the war that he refrained from expressing any further disapproval over Conrad's choice of a vocation.

Immediately after returning home Conrad re-enrolled with the Reinhardt Deutsches Theater, and re-established friendships with many of the actors and actresses and directors that he had previously known there. But now he was not just a figure in the background of the stage of the Deutsches Theater, perhaps just carrying a spear and not speaking any lines. Nor as a mere supernumerary to be called when another actor was ill or suddenly unavailable, but now as a full-fledged actor in many of the stage's productions.

Among Veidt's contemporary friends and co-workers on the stage during his early training days were the following famous theatrical names: Emil Jannings, Albert Bassermann, Paul Wegener, Mady

Christians, Ernst Lubitsch, Alexander Granach, Wilhelm Murnau, Alexander Moissi, Lucie Mannheim, Bernhard Goetzke, Rudolf Klein-Rogge, Ludwig Berger, Josef Schildkraut, and many others who would make important contributions to the stage and to film in this so-called "Blutezeit," or Golden Age, of German film.

One of Veidt's first successes after his return to the Reinhardt Theater was in the premiere of the play, *Die Koralle* (The Coral), in January 1917. In the last act of the play, Conrad portrayed with great feeling the part of a priest who listens to the confession of a condemned criminal and offers the prisoner an opportunity for atonement for his crimes. This perhaps could be considered as Veidt's real stage debut. It was a very small part (Conrad spoke only six lines) but the next day's newspapers contained two highly favorable reviews about him by important theater critics.

One of the critics, Siegfried Jacobson, who wrote for the well-known periodical, *Die Weltbühne* (The World Stage), and who was considered the theater critic most difficult to please, stated in his review that "there was a new actor named Conrad Veidt who brought a new face, a new voice, a new sound, and a full measure of magic to the play, and who in five theater minutes had brought the magic of a great personality to the stage." Jacobson then expressed his hope that "God would keep Veidt from the films." At that early date the infant film industry was not held in the high artistic esteem that it received later. Many famous legitimate theater actors and actresses looked down on the cinema with disdain. They felt the cinema was a mere temporary fad and a novelty and they did not consider the medium suitable for their superior talents and artistic expertise. They didn't realize that the cinema was a new medium with almost unlimited possibilities to offer.

The other drama critic was Fritz Engel, who wrote that Veidt's voice and vocal delivery "seemed like Moissi on the phonograph." He was referring to Alexander Moissi, a noted actor of that period with a powerful and distinctive voice. Conrad was extremely happy with these glowing reviews and prized them highly, as they were his first in what was to be a long and distinguished career with the theater and cinema.

After that Conrad received a much better role in the wonderful Reinhardt-staged play, *Der Seeschlacht* (The Sea Battle) by Goering. Veidt played a member of the German U-Boat crew. For Veidt, it was the first time that he had acted immediately under Reinhardt's *personal* direction. Actors are often a superstitious lot (regardless of their country

of origin). It is usually considered bad luck to wish an actor or actress "good luck" just before opening night of a new play. But whereas in the American theater the actors are jokingly enjoined to "break a leg," in the German and Austrian theater the traditional pre-curtain-raising wish to the apprehensive actors goes much further. Well-wishers there call out to their actor friends "Hals und Beinbruch"! This means "break your neck and legs"! Thus it was that Conrad's good friend and teacher, Albert Blumenreich, called out a hearty "Hals und Beinbruch!" to Veidt from backstage, just before the curtain went up for the new play *Der Seeschlacht*.

This was a period of exhaustive activity for Veidt. He was kept busy, and happily so, day after day at the Reinhardt Theater. His days were filled with rehearsing, and more rehearsing, attending play critiques, learning the art of stagecraft and finally, when all was ready on opening night, taking part in the play before an expectant audience. This was what Conrad wanted—the opportunity to appear on stage with celebrated actors and actresses in a quality production under the direction of a man (Reinhardt) who was a genuine legend in the German theater.

It takes a first-class play, a first-class group of actors, and first-class direction to hold an audience's rapt attention. If any of these three factors is lacking, the playgoers will be less than enthusiastic. Veidt used to say that there are few feelings in this world as wonderful as that feeling an actor gets when he senses all is well in a new play, and that the audience is being held spellbound by the characters in the play. Almost from the beginning of his stage apprenticeship, Conrad discovered, to his considerable amazement, that he could sway an audience with his intense voice and his eloquent gestures and expressive face. As the gifted British actor, Sir Ralph Richardson, once said: "The art of acting consists in keeping the audience from coughing."

On June 22, 1917, Conrad's father died in Berlin. Conrad was working with the Reinhardt Theater at this time and he was notified of his father's death. He hurried home to console his mother and to attend to the many details of the funeral. It became a continual matter of sadness and regret for Conrad that his father died before he could see his son's success in the theater. Conrad wanted so much for his father to realize that Conrad had chosen a worthwhile career and was well on the way to becoming a success in that career, and he wanted his father to be proud of him. Conrad had not been as close to his father as he wanted to be, and he felt

bad about not being able to impart his feelings to his father and to discuss with him many things of importance between father and son, especially such things as Conrad's hopes and ambitions for a career in the theater.

While Conrad was still a struggling young unknown studying acting at Reinhardt's theater, it was the custom there among the bachelor actors, after the last performance of the day, to go to a popular gathering place near Kurfürstendamm for some beer and sausages. After one particularly grueling day of rehearsals, the senior actors invited the newcomer, Conrad, to come along with them to "Mutter" Maenz's Cafe. Conrad agreed and joined Ernst Lubitsch, Emil Jannings, F.W. Murnau, Lothar Mendes, and others at the cafe.

The cafe owner, Frau Anna Maenz, who was affectionately called "Mutter" (mother) by the young actors, was a remarkably sympathetic and understanding woman. She permitted the young actors to use her cafe as a meeting place—a club, so to speak, where they could eat, drink, converse, play the piano, sing, dance, discuss the theory and practice of theater and stage, and generally relax and unwind after a long and difficult day of rehearsals under the strict eye of Max Reinhardt. Frau Maenz set aside a large back room, had a piano moved into it, and made excuses for "her boys" whenever their singing became a bit loud and disturbed other patrons of the cafe. After his first evening there, Conrad became a regular member of this bohemian group. He enjoyed Lubitsch's adept piano playing, as he shared Lubitsch's liking for the works of Chopin.

Sometimes the cafe was patronized by *established* actors, directors, and producers from both stage and screen. On those occasions, Conrad and his neophyte actor friends listened spellbound to stories told by such legends as Bassermann, Wegener, Rudolf Schildkraut, Moissi, Reinhardt, Pommer, Oswald and Messter, et al., about their theatrical experiences.

Another popular meeting place during Conrad's early struggling years (1917-1920) in Berlin was the Cafe des Westens. This was a favorite hangout for writers, artists and intellectuals of all types, as well as for thespians from stage and screen. Two of Conrad's particularly close friends, who would often meet him at this restaurant, were Heinrich Fraenkel and Friedrich Porges. Both men would later become famous as writers, film historians, and film critics. Porges also directed a documentary film in 1924 which featured cameo appearances by Veidt and other film industry celebrities.

Over several cups of coffee, Conrad, Heinrich and Friedrich would pore

over the theatrical section of the various daily newspapers, reading the critics' reviews of the plays and films of the day. On those occasions when Conrad's current stage or film role received less than, or much less than, rave reviews from the critics, Heinrich and Friedrich would subject Conrad to a stream of good-natured banter, assuring him that he would never amount to anything on the stage or screen, and strongly urging Conrad to pursue a different line of work. Perhaps as a janitor or a doorman at the theater, they suggested. They told Conrad that they would gladly speak to Max Reinhardt, Victor Barnowsky, or Leopold Jessner (three of the leading theater directors of the period) on Veidt's behalf, recommending him for the job of doorman or janitor. Conrad took their chaffing and teasing with good humor and a smile. On other (and more frequent) occasions, when Conrad's roles had received high critical praise, his two friends would order champagne and offer a toast to Conrad's continued success.

Still another favorite meeting place in Berlin for Conrad and his stage and cinema cronies was the Cafe Kranzler, located at the corner of Unter den Linden and Friedrichstrasse. Conrad, Heinrich Fraenkel, Friedrich Porges, actors Alexander Granach and Jack Trevor would frequently meet here for lunch. When the weather was nice, they preferred to sit outside on the terrace, engaging in animated conversation and exchanging stories about their respective careers while eating lunch.

Conrad fondly recalled a favorite saying of Max Reinhardt's. Frequently a student actor would become depressed after a scolding from Reinhardt regarding the student's poor performance in a rehearsal. The student would come to Reinhardt after the rehearsal and would ask him, "Do I have enough talent to continue studying and acting?" The great director would then tell the student, "Never mind your talent! Do you have the tenacity? You have to *want* to be an actor more than anything else in your life." Conrad mentioned this Reinhardt expression as an example of Reinhardt's unique method of teaching the art of the stage.

Conrad also liked to mention an unusual acting principle that he had learned from his stage mentor during his early period of tutelage at the Deutsches Theater. One day Reinhardt was giving his novice actors (Conrad among them) a critique of their just-completed play rehearsal. As Reinhardt discussed some of the more glaring errors that he had noticed, he brought up the subject of imagination. Reinhardt said, in a clear and measured tone for emphasis, "I am always surrounded by images." He

further stated, "Imagination can help an actor improve his performance on stage by inspiring him to greater creativity." Reinhardt taught his players not to repress, but rather to accept and use the creative images that appeared before their minds' eye, day or night, awake or sleeping. Reinhardt encouraged his actors to consider these images as "creative suggestions" from the conscious and subconscious mind for use in daily artistic endeavor.

Conrad admitted, years later, that initially he had not fully understood what Reinhardt had meant about images. But, as Conrad gained considerable stage experience, he realized the truth and the practicality of Reinhardt's theory. These mental images, Conrad learned, do enable an actor to "see" how to gain a better understanding of a current role and thus how to better interpret that role on stage. On many occasions Conrad was able to use these creative impulses to his advantage in stage and film roles.

Conrad's raw acting talent was shaped and developed by the chisels of Reinhardt's theater and the strenuous acting schedule of the Front Theater. These two forces transformed the tall, thin, eager youth into an incredibly skillful, confident, experienced, poised, sophisticated, and versatile actor.

Veidt fulfilled one of the dreams of his life when he was given a small part in the play, *Der Schöpfer* (The Creator) with the idol of his acting career, Albert Bassermann. Bassermann was the star of the play and was widely considered to be Germany's finest actor. The play, written by Hans Müller, received favorable reviews from the critics.



Veidt is shown here (on the right in group of three actors in the foreground) in a scene before the battle in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. This Deutsches Theater production was directed by Max Reinhardt in Berlin, circa 1914.

# 6

## Entry into Motion Pictures

**A**T FIRST CONRAD also inclined to the viewpoint that the film medium was not suitable for him, preferring the traditional legitimate stage. But in 1917, when offered the equivalent sum of \$25 per day (to Conrad at that time an astronomical salary), he accepted with alacrity.

There was another reason that caused Veidt to consider leaving the stage for a possible career in motion pictures. This was the fact that Conrad had seen, and enjoyed, several Charlie Chaplin comedies. He appreciated the unique comedic talents that Chaplin displayed in these early two-reelers from the silent screen. He laughed heartily at Chaplin's inspired slapstick antics and hilarious pratfalls and the broad humor offered in these pioneer farces on film. But Conrad was also deeply impressed with Chaplin's mastery of the art of pantomime. Although Conrad knew that he himself had no flair for comedy, he felt that motion pictures held a tremendous potential for drama and tragedy. It was this aspect of motion pictures, the dramatic roles, that appealed to Conrad and overcame his initial scepticism regarding the future of motion pictures.

At this important juncture in Conrad's life, two men appeared who had a significant influence on Veidt's final choice of careers. They were pioneer film producers Oskar Messter and Richard Oswald, each of whom made a practice of attending the Deutsches Theater to scout for talent to recruit. Both have been credited (depending on which film history authority you read) with being Veidt's discoverer for the cinema.

Oskar Messter was a contemporary of the Skladanowski brothers and shared with them in the invention and development of motion picture cameras and the advancement of cinema in Germany since 1895. Messter opened his film studio in 1897 on Friedrichstrasse in Berlin, and began producing comedies and other short films by the hundreds. With the success of these primitive films, Messter began in 1903 to produce full-





In this rare photo we see the pioneer inventor and producer of German films, Oskar Messter. Among the cast members chosen by Messter for his early films was a rising young actor named Conrad Veidt. Messter featured Veidt in three of his earliest films, in 1917 and 1918.

length feature films of better quality, also with considerable success.

Messter has been credited with introducing Emil Jannings, Henny Porten and Lil Dagover to films, as well as Conrad Veidt. Among Veidt's earliest films was the Messter-produced silent film, *Furcht* (Fear), released in 1917.

Later in 1917 Messter, pleased with Veidt's performance in *Furcht*, signed Conrad to a contract calling for his participation in two more Messter films. Conrad appeared in 1917 in a small part in *Die Claudi von Geiserhof* (Claudia From Geiserhof), directed by Rudolf Biebrach. Conrad's third and last film for Oskar Messter was the five-reel 1918 morality drama, *Opfer der Gesellschaft* (Society's Victim). The direction was by Willy Grunwald and the screenplay by Robert Wiene (later to direct the world-famous *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*). Veidt gave a creditable performance as prosecutor Chrysander in this film.

Messter's film studio merged with other German film companies in 1917, at the "suggestion" (translation: command) of Germany's wartime military strongman, General Ludendorff, to form the giant UFA firm. The huge UFA studio, which would soon be known as "Germany's Hollywood," was located at Neu Babelsberg, a Berlin suburb.

Richard Oswald, the other important influence on Veidt's life and career, was born in Vienna and became an actor and director on the legitimate stage. In 1914 Oswald began directing and producing the first



A rare photograph showing producer/director Richard Oswald, Veidt's longtime mentor and friend (seated, at center) and renowned cameraman/director, Karl Freund (seated, at right). In this photo, they are directing and filming Veidt (not pictured) in a scene while on the set of the historical portrait *Lacrezia Borgia*. In a 1958 interview with the author, Oswald stated that of all the individuals he had discovered and encouraged to become film actors, the one *most* versatile, intense, and charismatic performer of all was Conrad Veidt.

of over two hundred films. Two years later Oswald established his own motion picture company. Among the many future stars he is credited with discovering for the film, besides Conrad Veidt, are William Dieterle, Lya de Putti, Reinhold Schünzel, Heinrich George, Oscar Homolka, and Werner Krauss. On the negative side, Oswald once refused to hire Marlene Dietrich, believing that she had no talent or future as an actress!

Veidt was also approached by film producers from several other film studios, such as Deutsche Bioscop, Pax Film Co., Nivelli Film Co., Monumental Film Co., Frankfurter Film Co., Stern Film Co., etc. Veidt accepted their generous offers and participated in their film productions during the period 1917-1919. After that, Conrad's performances were primarily in Oswald Company films.

From thence forward, Conrad's name became part of cinema history. From 1917 to 1943 Veidt would participate in over one hundred films, originating in seven different countries (Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Sweden, Great Britain, and the United States) in addition to occasionally returning to the legitimate theater to appear in stage plays in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and other European countries.

With his expressive face and his tall, lean figure (Veidt's 165 lbs. were distributed over a 6'3" frame), Veidt seemed to be the very embodiment of strange and exotic characters; not the typical fellow next door and not the handsome young lover either. As a result, almost from the very beginning of Veidt's film career, he was typecast for the most part as a character actor or the villain. This stereotyping of Veidt by producers and casting directors made him ideally suitable in their minds for bizarre roles such as a terrifying psychopathic killer; a demon; the cruel tyrant; the sinister enemy officer; a furtive spy; the malevolent villain; the master criminal; and finally, during World War II, roles as a Nazi senior officer.

Only rarely did he get a role as the hero or as the young lover who wins the fair maiden at the happy ending of the movie. Consequently, Veidt became known in movie magazines and film reviews as "that actor of strange roles," and often was cast as "a creature of the night" in the early horror films. For most of his film career, Veidt was often referred to as "the demonic Conrad Veidt," as "The Man with the Wicked Eyes." One noted film critic of that period had described Conrad in a published review with this comment: "Conrad Veidt is a strange-looking young man with a face you can never forget!"

This new conception of Veidt as a stereotyped actor of strange roles in

films was in marked contrast to his previous stage career. But let Conrad describe it: "I was never a villain on the stage. I always played strong, sympathetic types. My first stage role with a speaking part, believe it or not, was as a priest. It wasn't until I began acting in films that the producers and directors saw me primarily as a bizarre villain. I was happy and content to play either 'the good guy' or 'the bad guy,' as they say in American slang, as long as the role and the screenplay called for plenty of dramatic conflict and emotional expression."

At this period of his life Conrad immured himself within the limits of the film studio and his small apartment. He concentrated on his work, determined to learn as much as possible about this exciting new art form of motion pictures. When Conrad wasn't needed for scenes in front of the camera, he could usually be found behind the camera, in the vicinity of the director and cameraman. There he observed the techniques of these two most important men in the creation of a new film, and frequently asked questions of them.

There seems to be some question as to which film was Veidt's first motion picture. Some history books indicate one film, while some other film authorities state another film was first. To the best of my knowledge, Veidt's first film was probably a routine programmer called *Der Spion* (The Spy), with Veidt in a minor role. Conrad's debut in this film took place in late July, 1917. I have emphasized the word "probably" because records of those early days are extremely rare and incomplete. Especially in the early silent films, discrepancies in the release date abound. If one were to conduct research on any given early silent film in four different film history reference books, one would likely end up with four different release dates for that film.

Another contributing factor to the regrettable lack of data on these early films of Veidt's was the practice prevalent in those days by "wise" and "farsighted" producers of refusing to give screen credits to the film players. They reasoned that if the actors and actresses became well-known to cinema audiences, the players would demand higher salaries. (Which is exactly what happened in later years, after the actors had banded together and insisted that their names be listed on the screen or on the cinema programs, or both.) Because many of the actors participating in the early motion pictures did not receive credit for their work, they probably took part in more films than their biographies and film histories might indicate.

Film production in Germany was increasing in 1917, due in large part

to the wartime Allied blockade. Since American, British, and French films no longer appeared in German theaters, the German film industry expanded to fill the resulting vacuum.

Entrepreneurs throughout Germany began to realize the vast potential market of film-hungry audiences in their country, as well as in neighboring countries, such as Austria-Hungary, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, etc. There was also a corresponding heavy demand for motion picture directors, actors, cameramen, writers, etc.

As mentioned earlier, Veidt appeared in an exotic melodrama with psychological overtones entitled *Furcht* in 1917. Produced by Oskar Messter and directed by Robert Wiene, this early film used Veidt to great advantage in a supporting role as a priest in India. Briefly stated, the plot concerned a man who, on a trip to India, steals a treasured idol from a temple, and brings the statue back to his home in Europe. He then begins



Conrad portrayed a wild-eyed Hindu priest intent on recovering a valuable stolen statue in the exotic psychological drama *Furcht*. Released in 1917, *Furcht* was one of the earliest films in which Veidt participated, and was produced by German film pioneer, Oskar Messter.

to suffer terrible nightmares and he fears for his life. There is then a flashback sequence to India wherein Veidt is seen as the head of the Indian priests who discover the theft of their sacred idol. Veidt's character then sets out to find the thief and recover the statue. Eventually, he turns up at the thief's home and threatens the thief with inexorable death. The thief ultimately commits suicide in desperation and the priest recovers the stolen idol. In his portrayal Veidt showed many flashes of the acting brilliance that would win him world acclaim two years later, when he appeared in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

Veidt's next film was *Das Rätsel von Bangalore* (The Mystery of Bangalore), also completed in 1917, which co-starred him with two famous screen players of that era, Harry Liedtke and Gilda Langer. Veidt played a maniacal Hindu in this melodrama about India.

The next step in Veidt's career was his participation in the important "Aufklärungsfilme" (enlightening films) which were directed by Richard Oswald. These "Aufklärungsfilme" were actually sex education films, which handled delicate subjects such as sex, incest, prostitution, abortion, venereal diseases, homosexuality, etc. in an objective, reserved manner, without unnecessary sensationalism; good entertainment but with a strong, clear moral. Some examples of these films by Oswald in which Veidt was featured, and which dealt with the problems of human sexuality, are as follows: *Es werde Licht* (Let There Be Light), released in 1918. This film concerned the terrible effects of syphilis and other venereal diseases. Then came *Prostitution*, released in 1919; and *Anders als die alle Andern* (Different From All the Others). The latter was a 1919 social hygiene drama and was the first film about homosexuality to be exhibited anywhere. The film dared to confront the audiences with a subject that was banned in literature and polite conversation of the day. In today's "anything goes" type of literary and cinematic climate, this may not seem to be much of a controversial item, but at the time it was considered radical and daring. Veidt had the starring role, and the cast included Reinhold Schünzel. The plot of this film concerns a famous violinist (Veidt) who is seduced by another homosexual (Schünzel). The new lover turns against the violinist and blackmails him, threatening to ruin him by revealing his secret. The violinist commits suicide rather than face the world with his secret.

Many of the existing prints of this landmark film were deliberately destroyed by the Nazis as they attempted to ban any exhibition of this

controversial motion picture. The Nazis felt that this film showed a side of the German people that was decadent and shameful and which had no place in "The New Order" of Hitler's Germany. Goebbels and his minions attempted to eradicate all visible traces of this "inferiority" in German Life.

For many years it was believed by students of film history that all prints of this film had been destroyed or lost. However, I have learned that on June 28, 1986, a New York PBS TV station exhibited this early Richard Oswald/Conrad Veidt film. It was exceedingly well received by TV viewers and film critics. This rare film stock was in surprisingly good condition considering its 67 years of age.

It has been reported that the film *Anders als die Andern* was the subject of many protests and violent demonstrations in the streets when the film was exhibited in post-World War I Germany. As a matter of fact, even while the film was still in the production stage at the studio, there were threats made against the producer/director, Oswald, and the star of



Veidt (at right) played the part of the tragic violinist, Paul Körner, in the very controversial film *Anders als die Andern*. This 1919 film, directed by Richard Oswald, also featured Reinhold Schünzel (at left, in white clothing).

the film, Veidt. Veidt ignored the controversy about the film and his role in it, believing that the film was justified by the inequalities and persecution suffered by homosexuals in the society of that period.

In Germany after World War I there was a law on the books, specifically Paragraph 175 of the German National Penal Code, that banned homosexual acts and provided severe penalties for those involved. The purpose of this film by Richard Oswald, and the campaign by Dr. Hirschfeld and his Institute of Sexual Science, was to elicit public support for tolerance for homosexuals, and for the abolition of this unjust law. The film was done in a manner that refrained from any crass sensationalism. Dr. Hirschfeld made an eloquent plea for tolerance in his introduction at the premiere showing of this landmark film. The following is an excerpt from that introduction:

"The matter to be put before your eyes and souls today is one of severe importance and difficulty. Difficult, because the degree of ignorance and prejudice to be disposed of is extremely high. Important, because we must free not only these people from undeserved disgrace but also the public from a judicial error that can be compared to such atrocities in history as the persecution of witches, atheists and heretics. Besides this, the number of people who are born "different from the others" is much larger than most parents know or care to realize. The film you are about to see for the first time today will help to terminate the lack of enlightenment, and soon the day will come when science will win a victory over error, justice a victory over injustice, and human love a victory over human hatred and ignorance."

This combination of the educational and entertaining, with emphasis on morality, was best expressed by Oswald, and has been widely copied since that time. These "Aufklärungsfilme" caused considerable controversy in their day, as they made audiences think about and discuss the important social issues in question. Even long after the audiences had left the theaters, they would ponder the stimulating themes and morals posed by the films. Also, the government encouraged these sex education films in the hope of lessening the widespread incidence of venereal diseases in Germany.

Even though Oswald had the foresight to have his films sponsored,



endorsed, and supported by agencies and individuals who had legitimate standing in the German society of that day, there were still frequent protests and demonstrations against the "Aufklärungsfilme." However, as in so many societies, the protests against these films only seemed to publicize them and to increase the box office receipts. Banning a literary product or a cinematic work only serves as good, free advertisement. As the old saying goes, "Every knock is a boost." And as the commercial receipts increased, so did the number of films produced.

Government cinema censorship had grown progressively lax. It finally reached the point in December, 1918, at which the government actually abolished all censorship of motion pictures. This government policy move was immediately understood by the German cinema industry heads as permission to film any topic in any manner they wished. Consequently,



Veidt and Erna Morena (right) in the 1918 morality play *The Diary of a Lost One*. Veidt was cast as Dr. Julius. This was the first motion picture in which Veidt had a starring role.

for the next fifteen months a flood of cheap, quickly-made, lurid movies were produced and exhibited, in the hope of capitalizing on the public's interest in erotic themes. Films with titles such as *Hyänen der Lust* (Hyenas of Lust); *Verlorene Töchter* (Lost Daughters); and *Frauen, die der Abgrund verschlingt* (Women Engulfed By the Abyss) were typical of this torrent of sleazy films. Oswald's films, while covering similarly delicate subjects, nevertheless attempted to treat the subjects in good taste and with some redeeming social value.

In 1918, Oswald released *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* (Diary of a Lost One). The story concerns a trifling, flirtatious woman (Erna Morena) and the devastating effect her wiles had on Dr. Julius (Veidt). To my knowledge, this is the first film in which Veidt had a leading role. Other members of the capable, experienced cast were Werner Krauss and Reinhold Schünzel. Also released in 1918 were two more rather interesting films: *Das Dreimäderl Haus* (The House of Three Girls), with Anita Berber, and *Jettchen Gebert*, with Julius Spielmann. Veidt played the part of Baron Schober in the first film, which was about the life of the composer Franz Schubert. In the second film, *Jettchen Gebert*, Conrad had the role of the young lover. This was one of the rare times when Veidt



In this still photo Veidt (extreme left) is shown in the role of the state prosecutor in the film *Opfer der Gesellschaft* (Society's Sacrifice). This film, released in 1919, was an absorbing drama of morality.

was cast in a romantic role instead of a sinister or macabre part. Veidt also had a leading role in Oswald's 1918 film about abortion, which was entitled *Sündige Mutter* (Sinning Mother).

As stated above, films of this subject matter seem rather tame in comparison with the very explicit sexual photoplays of today. But in the Germany of 1918-1919 the opposition to these films surfaced in the form of boisterous demonstrations, protest meetings, and minor riots near the theaters where these controversial motion pictures were being exhibited. An earlier counterpart of our present day "Moral Majority" finally convinced the government to do something. This resulted in the restoration of film censorship by the German National Assembly in May, 1920. After that, the German film studios had much less latitude in their choice of subject matter and their treatment of delicate themes.

# 7

## Conrad's Marriage and Divorce

CONRAD MARRIED for the first time after he had been working in films for approximately one year. (Conrad was to marry twice more in his lifetime.) His bride was the famous actress and cabaret entertainer of that period, Auguste Marie Holl, nicknamed "Gussy."

Early in the spring of 1918 the Oswald studio gave a party to celebrate Conrad's first appearance in a *starring* film role. Many members of the Berlin stage and screen community were invited. Among those attending was a woman Conrad would later describe as being "very lovely, tall, dignified, and somewhat aloof." While mingling with the guests, Conrad happened to look across the room and notice this attractive woman. As Conrad described that special moment: "Our eyes met, she smiled at me, and there was born an understanding that I felt nothing could ever spoil." That woman was Gussy Holl. Conrad and Gussy enjoyed several dances that evening, and sat at a table, eating, drinking, and conversing, seemingly oblivious of the other people in the ballroom and engrossed only in themselves. After that first meeting Conrad and Gussy began to see each other often. Or, at least, as often as their conflicting working schedules would permit. Conrad's busy schedule consisted primarily of early morning and afternoon filming at the film studio, as well as the occasional stage work, rehearsing, and performing in various theaters, when he was "in between films." Gussy's performances at the cabaret began in the evening and continued to the 3 a.m. closing time of the cabaret. After a frustrating period of this sort of schedule conflict (even their days off didn't always coincide), the lovers felt that this was no way to be together and they decided to marry.

The large wedding took place on June 18, 1918, and was attended by many relatives and friends of the bride and the groom. These friends included most of the prominent actors, actresses, directors, and producers

of the German show business world of that day. After a brief honeymoon trip to Austria, the couple returned to Berlin, where they settled down in a very attractive home in the suburbs.

After the couple's return to Berlin from Austria, Conrad was called back to work at the film studio. One of the more interesting of Veidt's films of 1919 was the Richard Oswald-produced and Victor Barnowsky-directed production of the famous Ibsen play *Peer Gynt*. This fine satirical story was based on the life of the Norwegian folk hero, Peer Gynt, who leaves home and travels around the world. During the course of his journey Peer experiences many adventures. He finally returns to his home in Norway where he is saved from the grasp of the Button Molder. Ibsen used the character of the Button Molder to represent an agent of God, who is trying to capture Peer's soul. Veidt gave a gem of a performance as the Button Molder.

Unfortunately, Conrad's marriage to Gussy was not an enduring one, as seemingly insurmountable problems arose between them very soon. They lived together for about one year, and then realizing that neither one was really happy in their marriage, they agreed to a separation. Several attempts were made over the next few years to reconcile but all attempts were unsuccessful. Gussy and Conrad were divorced in 1922. Gussy later married another famous actor of that day, Emil Jannings; and Conrad would remarry also.

Incidentally, Gussy Holl appeared in six films with Conrad, as follows: *Die Prostitution* (Prostitution); *Die sich verkaufen* (Those Who Sell Themselves); *Wahnsinn* (Madness); *Die Nacht auf Goldenhall* (The Night At Goldenhall); *Sehnsucht* (Desire); and *Menschen im Rausch* (People In Ecstasy).

Meanwhile World War I had finally ended, on November 11, 1918, after exacting a fearful toll in human lives and property. Germany was now in the midst of a tremendous social, political, and economic upheaval and unrest, and the German people were going through terribly hard times. In this post-war Germany, inflation was rising to a shattering all-time high. There was much political dissension and strife, and there was hunger, suffering, and pessimism throughout the land. These factors would influence the German film industry, as well as all other facets of the lives of the German people. One result of the times seemed to be the emphasis on dark, somber themes that overtook the German cinema. For the next decade or so, an inordinately large number of German films

would concern themselves with tales of demons, murderers, supernatural beings, and sadistic tyrants. In the following pages, examples of this peculiar German preoccupation with such dark sides of human nature will be mentioned, in that Conrad Veidt was featured in many such films.

In addition to the dreadful war, with its attendant death and suffering, another factor (perhaps the greater factor) contributed to the large number of German films with dark and supernatural themes. This was the mental make-up of the German people themselves. Their undue pleasure in stories of horror and their preoccupation with the strange and eerie and terrifying aspects of life and death, appears to be more than coincidental to the prolific production of horror stories on film in Germany.

Heinrich Heine, one of Germany's greatest writers, eloquently expressed this German characteristic long before there was a German cinema: "Leave to us Germans the horrors of delirium, the dreams of feverishness, and the kingdom of ghosts."<sup>1</sup>

After the trauma of the break-up of his marriage to Gussy Holl, Conrad went through a period of depression and for a while passed up offers received by his agent from the film studios. Conrad finally realized that he had to break out of his mood of despair. He then attempted to keep busy by immersing himself in his work. He accepted almost all of the scripts and film offers proffered to him. This new outlook and renewed activity occurred at an opportune time. Veidt was to receive an offer that would open many new doors to him and would change his life.

1. *Die Romantische Schule*, by Heinrich Heine, 1833.

## 8

### Veidt's First Major Film Success: "Caligari"

CONRAD'S NEXT IMPORTANT film was the expressionistic masterpiece, *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari), a Decla-Bioscop film of 1919. To say that this film is a screen classic is pure understatement. It is one of the all-time great works that the cinema industry has produced. I daresay that if a survey were taken today of the top cinema historians and film critics, asking them to list the fifteen most important films of all time, this film would be on the vast majority of their lists. For just one example of this, I submit the name of Charles Champlin, who is one of the foremost film critics in the United States today. In 1981, Champlin prepared a list of the sixteen best films of all time, world-wide, and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is included in that list.<sup>1</sup> I believe that this list is still valid today.

Expressionism in motion pictures was primarily a German innovation. Expressionism had already appeared as a form of the fine arts, in painting, literature, sculpture, and drama. Then, after the end of World War I, German film producers, directors, writers, stage designers, and actors of that period began to use expressionism on the screen. They intended it as a means of depicting emotional and dramatic ideas through symbolism, stylization of acting, and with stereotyped characters. Usually the sets and lighting utilized in these films were distorted and abstract in nature. The majority of these films seemed to dwell on the macabre, the bizarre, and the fantastic in their themes.

*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is probably the prime example of expressionism in the entire history of film. According to many film critics,

1. Charles Champlin's 16 All-Time Best Films from the *Book of Movie Lists*, by Gabe Essoe, Arlington House, 1981.

"Caligari," directed by Robert Wiene, was the first true horror film of any artistic value. This film had tremendous influence on the cinematic world. Students of film history and observant cinema devotees may see and appreciate traces of similar style in the direction, set design, acting, camerawork, etc., in many films that followed this landmark motion picture.

Although not an outstanding box office success by today's standards, "Caligari" was a great artistic and critical success and caused a sensation when first shown in German theaters. It is still shown to this day on television and in art museums and film clubs around the world.

"Caligari" was Conrad Veidt's first major film success and it had far-reaching effects on his career. Predictably, this was one of Veidt's favorite films also.

In this film, Veidt portrayed the murderous somnambulist, Cesare, and his acting skill was widely acclaimed, as was the cinematic contribution of almost everyone connected with the production of the film. This included



Veidt's first major success was in the world-famous expressionist film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Here he is seen as Cesare, the murderous sleepwalker, sitting up in the crate, at left, while master, Dr. Caligari (Werner Krauss) is seen at right.



the producer, Erich Pommer; the director, Robert Wiene; the imaginative script writers, Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz (who intended their screenplay as a critical message about the intolerable conditions in Germany of that era and as an attack on the stifling authoritarianism of the German government); and the three set designers: Walter Reimann, Hermann Warm, and Walter Röhrig. Of course, the fine acting by the other principal players was also noted. Werner Krauss was excellent as the evil Dr. Caligari, the somnambulist's master. Lil Dagover was excellent as Jane, the girl kidnapped by Cesare. Friedrich Feher played the important role of Francis, the patient who tells the story; and Hans Heinz Twardowski was Alan, the friend of Francis, who is stabbed to death, ostensibly by Cesare under the evil guidance of Caligari.

In the marvelous film the story unfolds with two men sitting on a bench in a park, conversing. One man, Francis, is telling his friend about some very strange events that have taken place in their little town of Holstenwall recently. At this time there is a traveling fair encamped in the town. Among the sideshows in the fair is a new attraction—the sinister Dr. Caligari and his hypnotized somnambulist, Cesare. Cesare is



Another still from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, depicting Cesare (Veidt) kidnapping Jane (Lil Dagover) from her bedroom. Note the distorted and expressionistic background of the film studio set.

supposedly capable of foretelling the future, while in a trance, at Dr. Caligari's direction. In order to perform as part of this fair, Dr. Caligari is required to obtain a license from the town clerk, who treats Caligari in a cruel and arrogant manner, submitting him to unnecessary indignities. The next day it is learned that the town clerk has been murdered.

Francis feels that the murder of the clerk and the other strange events in Holstenwall have occurred only since the arrival of the traveling fair and, specifically, since Dr. Caligari and Cesare have arrived. The next day Francis and his friend Alan go to the fortune-teller's booth and Alan asks Cesare what his fortune will be. Cesare replies that Alan has only until dawn to live. That very night Alan is stabbed to death in his room by an unknown assailant. Francis immediately suspects Caligari and Cesare and so he goes to Caligari's tent to see if Cesare is there. Caligari shows Francis a still, dark dummy lying in a coffin and tells him that that is Cesare, asleep. But, in fact, the real Cesare has left the sideshow and has forced his way into the bedroom of Jane, Francis' fiancée. He has been sent there allegedly by Caligari to murder Jane. As Cesare approaches the sleeping Jane in her bed, he is overcome with her beauty and falls in love with her, and decides to kidnap her instead. He then carries Jane off over the rooftops and through the narrow streets of the town. However, Jane's screams attract a large crowd of townsmen who pursue Cesare, causing him to set Jane free. The mob then chases Cesare into the wilderness.

Still suspecting Caligari and Cesare of the murders, Francis reports his suspicions to the police and he and the police follow Caligari. Caligari takes refuge in an insane asylum. At this time Caligari is apprehended and placed in a straitjacket.

This was the original screenplay, as offered by the team of Janowitz and Mayer. However, with the framing story superimposed on the original screenplay, we find that Francis, as well as Jane and Alan and Cesare, are all patients in a mental institution, and the opening scene, with the two men sitting on a park bench, was in reality a garden area on the insane asylum grounds. The supposedly evil Dr. Caligari is in reality the director of the asylum, who is trying to cure Francis' mental illness!

The original version was intended to communicate the scriptwriter's message: that the authorities were insane, immoral people, who had no qualms about sending young innocent men off to their deaths in a useless, evil war. The young people, like Francis and Alan and Jane, were the equivalent of the victims of society, who were murdered by the ruthless

government's orders. Cesare represented the willing, ignorant, blindly obedient puppet of the militaristic authorities, who would commit murder without emotion. But this strong message, this harsh attack on the authoritative figures of the government of that day, was softened by the framing story. The resulting story was still a marvelous film, and the symbolism expressed was very effective.

There are several scenes from this film that stand out in the viewers' memories. One such scene is that in which we see Cesare standing upright in his coffin, apparently asleep. Then Caligari gives his spiel, as follows: "Step up, step up, everyone! See Cesare, the somnambulist. Cesare has slept for 25 years, and is about to waken. Cesare knows all secrets. Ask him to tell you your future." Then Caligari speaks to Cesare, saying, "Wake up, Cesare, I command you." We then see Cesare's eyes open slowly, and his satanic stare is most horrifying. This moment, as Cesare slowly opens his darkened eyelids to reveal a pair of staring, malevolent eyes, still has the power to frighten viewers. After this riveting scene Cesare leaves to do his master's lethal bidding.



Another photo from the expressionistic classic, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Veidt, as Cesare, has kidnapped Jane (Lil Dagover) in compliance with the orders of his evil master, Dr. Caligari.



In this close-up shot from the film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, the terrifying staring eyes of the maniacal sleepwalker, Cesare, are clearly seen. Veidt's portrayal of Cesare was one of his most remarkable roles.

This was an original story, for the most part, taken from Janowitz' book entitled *Three Chapters from Hamburg*. However, it also borrowed from one of Edgar Allan Poe's stories, *The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether*, about the head of an insane asylum who later becomes deranged himself. The "framing story," used to relate a story within a story, is a cinematic device frequently used by filmmakers since this pioneer film.

The sets in the film contributed much to the unreal atmosphere of the story, with the expressionistic architecture of the town; the painted backdrops and the imaginative use of light and shadow, the sharp distorted

angles, the striking black and white shadowy effects and contrasts, the ingenious lighting, the eerie close-up shots, all of which heightened the total effect. The location of the story—a small sideshow from a traveling fair, and an insane asylum, and the crooked streets in the town, were all emphasized with camera work that was marvelous. "Caligari" was perhaps the first film to utilize the vast potential of a mobile camera. The film was far ahead of its time.

*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* had considerable changes made in the casting. Originally, the producer, Erich Pommer, had Fritz Lang in mind to direct. Lang was not available, however, as he was busy on the set of the third film in the series of *Die Spinnen* (The Spiders) and could not be released from that responsibility. Pommer's next choice was Robert Wiene, whose previous cinema work Pommer was familiar with and respected. This proved to be an admirable choice. Then Pommer had planned to have the beautiful actress, Gilda Langer, portray Jane, the girl who is abducted by Cesare. But just before the filming was to begin, Langer became quite ill with a lung infection and was unable to work. It has also been said that this very pretty and talented young actress was a user of narcotics and this added to her health problems. Lil Dagover was chosen to replace Langer as Jane. This was another fine choice by Pommer, who had a positive genius for picking the right person for the job, whether it was a director, or actor, or cameraman, or set designer.

German producers and directors had been looking for an actor who could project and express the dark and secret forms and demonic images of both the real world and the dream (or nightmare) world for some time. Already on the scene in Germany at this time was a group of five marvelous actors—Albert Bassermann, Paul Wegener, Emil Jannings, Werner Krauss, and Reinhold Schünzel. Directors could satisfy the casting leads of most of their films with one or more actors from this uniquely talented group. But Erich Pommer felt that a different face, a different acting persona, a different style, was needed for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. When one of Pommer's assistants mentioned Veidt as a promising young actor working for Richard Oswald's film studio, Pommer telephoned and invited Veidt to come in for an interview. The rest, as they say, is history. Veidt was chosen for the important role of the murderous somnambulist, and his name soon became a household word for the strange, the bizarre, and the demonic.

There was also lengthy discussion about the script for the film, and the

newly-assigned director, Wiene, suggested a change in the story line. The two scriptwriters, Janowitz and Mayer, protested vehemently but they were overruled by Pommer. The altered story diluted the clear and biting accusation of the German authoritarian government, which sent its men to war and to their deaths. Wiene's version, with his "framing story" related by a madman, changed the final cinematic result from a rebellious story to a much less politically radical one; a less angry and less antigovernment film.

This extraordinary, macabre and grotesque motion picture was one of the primary forerunners of the many German films, which dwelled on murderers, monsters, ghouls, vampires, maniacs, etc., and which appeared frequently in movie theaters in the period, 1917 through approximately 1933.

Among all the actors in the film, Veidt especially made a lasting impression on the audiences with his tall, gaunt, black leotard-clad figure as he seemed to glide along the streets of the town. At times his lithe creeping along the wall in a diagonal manner was like a ballet of terror. The eerie way Veidt seems to float like an ominous cloud over the rooftops of the small town, carrying Jane as though she were a limp doll, has rarely been equalled in the cinema for sheer horror and menace. This same feeling of horror also applies to the close-up shots of Cesare's face in the side-show. At one point the camera is so close to Cesare's face that Veidt's huge and staring eyes seem almost to fill the entire screen. I think I will always remember those haunted, harrowing eyes that seem to go right through the viewer.

There are threads of other themes in this strangely disturbing and macabre story. First, there is the intended attack on the authoritarianism of the day in Germany. Then there are strong hints of Freudian theories involving madness, dreams, sexual aberrations, guilt complexes, etc. One individual viewing this film may see only a simple tale of crime—two murders and a kidnapping. Another viewer, more politically aware and cynical about the world, may see and understand the symbolism the scriptwriters intended as a message against the government of that day. A third viewer may perceive a different meaning, a story of deranged minds seeking help. Discerning intellectuals and students of abnormal psychology might discover still other meanings and overtones and interpretations.

The first premiere of "Caligari" in Berlin was less than sensational. The film was not understood or appreciated at first and the film was

therefore withdrawn from its normal run of exhibition on the film circuit. At this point Pommer and his assistants initiated an intensive publicity campaign in Berlin. All over the city billboards held the strange message: "Du musst Caligari werden!" (You must become Caligari!). Naturally, there was widespread interest and curiosity among the residents of Berlin who saw the signs on billboards almost everywhere. They asked themselves and each other, "What is a Caligari?" This publicity tactic was very effective, as weeks went by with everyone wondering and inquiring who or what a Caligari was. Then finally the suspense was over, and their questions were answered when the film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* was given a second showing at a large premiere in the Marmorhaus Theater in Berlin in February, 1920. Newspapers carried large advertisements about the film, moviegoers streamed into the theater each day, and the film was a rousing success. The whole city seemed to be talking about "Caligari."

Hans Janowitz, the co-author of the original "Caligari" screenplay, wrote an article many years later, giving his impressions of the premiere at the Marmorhaus Theater in Berlin on that evening of February 26, 1920. Janowitz wrote that he and his gifted collaborator, Carl Mayer, were standing at the rear of the theater gallery, hoping that the huge audience would understand the story and approve of the film.

As the film neared the final scenes Janowitz and Mayer looked at each other with expressions combining apprehension and hope. When the film ended, and the theater lights came up, there was complete silence from the packed house. Janowitz and Mayer immediately interpreted the unexpected dead silence to indicate that the film was a monumental failure. But moments later the theater erupted with noise, as the audience shattered the silence with thunderous applause. This ovation became even louder, as in addition to the loud applause, there were now vociferous shouts from the audience, calling for the film's producer, director, and actors to appear on the stage.

At this point Janowitz and Mayer smiled at each other and shook hands effusively. They then quietly left the theater to celebrate their success at a nearby bar. Meanwhile, in response to the applause, Erich Pommer, Robert Wiene, Werner Krauss, Conrad Veidt, Hans Twardowski, and several members of the film production crew stood up and gratefully acknowledged the audience's acclamation. Pommer and his associates now realized that the film, on its second showing, was a tremendous success.

The silence that at first seemed to denote withering disapproval, turned out to mean just the opposite. The audience-members were so stunned by the strangeness of the story and the impact of the film that it took them several moments to collect their thoughts and then express their hearty approval.

The film received an extensive publicity build-up throughout Germany. The same advertising ploy, with the unusual slogan of "Du musst Caligari werden" was used in all of the larger cities of Germany, thus focusing the public's attention on the film. This method attracted thousands of moviegoers to learn for themselves what was all the hullabaloo about Caligari. This huge publicity campaign in Berlin and other large German cities, with billboards, handbills, newspaper and magazine advertisements, personal appearances by the stars of the film, etc., was highly successful.

Due to the large number of protests and the general anti-German feeling at the time (1919), "Caligari" was refused a showing in some parts of the United States, especially in the Los Angeles area. Many of these protests came from such groups as the American Legion, Actors Equity, and the Motion Picture Directors Association. This was partly an attempt to stop or slow down the growing influx of European films, particularly German films.

After this film was finally shown in America in its premiere in 1920 in New York City, the prestigious *National Board of Review* magazine said of it, as follows: "It is a fantasy of terror, told with the virtuosity of a poet, in terms of the screen." Many other periodicals and critics in the United States at the time offered similar paeans of praise for the film and for all the persons who were connected with its production. The *New York Times* film critic called "Caligari" "a cubistic shocker!!"

Another favorable review of this film from a critic of that day was as follows: "It is a matter of record that no picture, not even *The Birth of a Nation*, ever created quite as much comment, argument, and speculation in one month's time."

A review of this film is quoted from Liam O'Leary's superb book, *The Silent Cinema*,<sup>2</sup> in which he wrote: "There has never been a film quite like this, and its influence has been felt all through the cinema!"

Paul Rotha, the noted British producer of documentary films and author of books about films, once described this film thusly: "Like a drop

2. *The Silent Cinema*, by Liam O'Leary. Dutton Co., 1965.



of wine in an ocean of salt water, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* appeared in the profusion of films during the year 1920."

One perceptive film critic of that era, from the periodical *Exceptional Photoplays*, described this most revolutionary German film as follows: "The film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, is a revelation of what the motion picture is capable of as a form of artistic expression."

Among the many producers, directors, set designers, actors, cameramen, etc., who were greatly influenced by the "Caligari" film were the following five world-famous film directors: Fritz Lang, Alfred Hitchcock, Rene Clair, Orson Welles, and Abel Gance. Rene Clair described this film as being "cerebral cinema." Abel Gance described it as follows: "The film is superb. What a lesson for all directors!" The consensus of opinion among film directors and producers throughout the world was their belief that this film was a notable revolutionary achievement in motion picture art. Parenthetically, I might add that this milestone film also had a long-lasting effect on Veidt, as well. Conrad reportedly made the following statement much later in his career: "No matter what roles I play, I can't get 'Caligari' out of my system."

There is another scene from this film which stands out in my memory. That is the one in which we see the shadow, presumably of Cesare, enter Alan's bedroom. Then we see the shadow of this figure holding a dagger overhead and plunging it down and stabbing the sleeping figure of Alan.

Still another remarkable scene in this film is the final shot of Veidt. We see Veidt as the tall, sinister figure in black, Cesare, holding a white flower. He is stroking the petals of the flower in a very delicate and tender manner. The contrast between Cesare, the murderous sleepwalker, and Cesare, the gentle patient in the mental asylum, is quite evident here.

It has been reported that the film "Caligari" was exhibited at one Paris theater continuously for nearly seven years!

For a bit of trivia, it might be mentioned here that the unusual name of "Caligari" was chosen by the screenplay writers, Janowitz and Mayer, from a character in Stendahl's book, *Unknown Letters*.

The original script by Mayer and Janowitz was sold to the Decla studio for the equivalent sum of approximately \$185. Some cinema historians report also that the entire cost of producing this landmark photoplay was only about \$18,000!

One more note about this film is that the settings used in this cinema, which became world-famous for their originality and innovative style, cost

the studio less than \$800. Due to the scarcity of electrical power in post-war Germany, the set designers (Warm, Reimann, and Röhrig) suggested and Pommer, the head of production for the studio, agreed that expressionistic sets, with painted canvases, be used to convey the light and dark shadows and distorted motifs of the story. Since electricity was severely rationed in Germany in 1919, this fresh and clever approach actually saved the studio considerable expense in production costs, while at the same time introducing something different and noteworthy. Another way that the studio saved on expenses was in the salaries of the cast. Veidt and the other principal players were paid \$30 per day while working on this film! All in all, a masterpiece of cinematic art was achieved for a bare minimum of expenditure. It can be stated that with "Caligari," the German film industry reached the zenith of the Expressionism movement.

## 9

### After "Caligari": Continued Experience and Success in Films

**A**FTER THE TREMENDOUS success of and acclaim for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, Veidt was in great demand as an actor and took part in scores of films over the next few years. Some were works of outstanding cinematic art, while others ranged from excellent entertainment to mere routine programmers. He worked under the best of the directors of those days: such men as Oswald, Wiene, Dupont, Galeen, Czinner, May, Fejos, Leni, Murnau, Charell, Schünzel, and many others. Although Veidt had tremendous talent and a fascinating personality, and was a gifted actor, it is only fair to say that he owed much of his final international success to the many producers and directors of his early days, who guided him along to the pinnacle of fame. Such men as Erich Pommer, production head of Decla-Bioscop, and later chief executive, from 1923 on, of the giant UFA film organization; Richard Oswald, who had Veidt under exclusive contract, who is generally credited with discovering Veidt for the films, and who directed him in many of his early films; Max Reinhardt, who noticed the latent ability and talent of Veidt and sensed that he would go far, and who taught him much about the stage.

In 1919, soon after it was apparent that *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* was a great success, Conrad visited his mother at the old house on Tieckstrasse where he was born. Conrad was happy that his mother was well and in good spirits. He was also pleased to be able to tell her of his newly-achieved fame and fortune. Especially since it was in a career choice which seemed to be extremely unwise, at best, on that day in 1912 when Conrad had confided in his mother his dream of becoming an actor. Conrad

embraced his mother warmly and thanked her for her unflagging encouragement and support during his early days at the Reinhardt Theater. At the same time, Conrad missed his father and regretted that his father was no longer alive to witness his son's success.

After Veidt's huge success in "Caligari," he and his good friend, Friedrich W. Murnau, decided to form a film company in 1919 as a partnership, to be called the Murnau-Veidt Filmgesellschaft. Along with the two prime founders, Murnau and Veidt, there were several former members of Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater repertory group in this new company. These players included Alfred Abel, Ernst Hoffman, Eugen Klöpfer, Olga Tscheschowa, Paul Hartmann, Lya de Putti, and Adele Sandrock.

It was under this company's logo that Murnau directed his first films and began a fabulous directorial career that included many remarkable and innovative films, both in Germany and in Hollywood. Among the first films he directed, there were four films which featured Veidt in important roles. These were: *Satanas*; *Der Januskopf*; *Abend, Nacht und Morgen*; and *Der Gang in die Nacht*. Although these four films were not outstanding photoplays perhaps, they were all well above average films in many respects. They gave a clear indication of Murnau's directorial ability, displaying that artistic character and style that was to become a Murnau trademark. And, of course, Veidt's acting added much to his growing reputation as an intense, gifted thespian.

Murnau once gave Veidt a marvelous compliment. Murnau was talking to the members of the cast and film crew on the set of one of his early films and he mentioned how he valued Veidt's presence in the cast. He said, in effect, that Veidt was able to arouse enthusiasm and increase the motivation of the other cast members on the set by his total concentration in his role and by his intense interest in, and complete commitment to, the film production they were all working on. Murnau also said that Veidt's acting always added a special dimension of style and dramatic artistry to his films.

Veidt, for his part, responded that he enjoyed working for Murnau, as he appreciated Murnau's artistic ability and his flair for the unusual and dramatic aspects of cinema production. Veidt felt that Murnau had a special skill in cinema composition, lighting, staging, camera use, and story pace. In short, Murnau and Veidt worked well together and their cinema partnership was a success.

During the period 1917-1919, Veidt was undecided about which road to take in his acting career: whether to remain with the security and familiarity of the legitimate theater, or to concentrate on the risky, and possibly only temporary, new field of the motion pictures. As a result of this uncertainty, Conrad tried to do both, and wavered between the stage and the studio. He went from a play by Reinhardt to a film by Oswald. Then from a stage production by Barnowsky to a film by Wiene. Veidt continued in this fashion until worldwide fame and success arrived with *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. After that, Conrad chose the cinema and only occasionally returned to the theater stage.

Veidt at first agreed completely with his friend and co-worker at the Deutsches Theater, Emil Jannings, about motion pictures. They both disliked films as compared to the legitimate theater. Both men entered films reluctantly, doing so primarily because the salaries paid by the film studios were so much higher than those paid for the stage. Jannings' candid opinion of the films, stated in an interview (supposedly off-the-record) was as follows: "I think the motion picture industry is a stupid business and I despise acting the scenes in short snatches, one at a time. I hate this film work. I am disgusted with myself. On the stage I could never play a part unless I felt it with all my heart and soul."

But whereas Jannings never really came to like or appreciate the films, and merely tolerated them, Veidt, from 1919 on, changed his mind about them, seeing in the motion picture a great medium with a tremendous potential for expressing and illustrating the distinguished works of literature as well as new and original screenplays. He enthusiastically entered into the infant film medium, accepting new film assignments with alacrity and stoically enduring the minor inconveniences and differences encountered on the studio set.

Unfortunately, space doesn't permit a full synopsis of the plot of each motion picture mentioned in this book. Only on the better-known and superior films have I provided additional information beyond the date, cast, and director's name.

In 1919, the following unusual Veidt films were released: *Colomba*, with Werner Krauss; and *Die Okarina*, with Rudolf Lettinger.

A notable film of 1919 was *Prince Cuckoo*. This was an effective satire about a newly-rich man, nicknamed "Prince Cuckoo," who creates havoc among the people around him with the power that his tremendous wealth gives him. Veidt had the role of Karl, a poor but honest relative of the rich man. Recognizing the rich man's tyrannical, depraved, and deceit-

ful nature, Karl attempts to fight against the wealth and power of his cousin, only to lose the struggle and be killed by Cuckoo in the film's climax. Paul Leni directed this psychological study with skill and originality. Other members of the cast included Nils Prien, Erik Charell, and Hanna Ralph.

Later in 1919 came *Around the World in 80 Days*, based on Jules Verne's famous and imaginative story, with Veidt in the principal role of the world traveler, Phileas Fogg. Co-starring with him were Erna Morena and Reinhold Schünzel.

Next in 1919, the film *Opium* was released by Meinert-Films. It was directed by Robert Reinert, and in addition to Veidt the cast included Werner Krauss, Eduard von Winterstein, and Hanna Ralph. The film dealt with the problems and perils of narcotics addiction. Of especial note were the scenes that depicted debauches of sex and drugs.

Veidt gave a remarkable performance as Richard Armstrong, a man who is having an affair with the wife of his close friend. Armstrong is so obsessed with guilt from the affair that he commits suicide in atonement. This silent melodrama, though naturally dated in acting style and other aspects, still has a valid message for us today. It makes a strong case for an end to the usage of narcotics. This film caused something of a sensation when first exhibited in a very expensive Berlin theater, where it ran for almost a month with all seats sold!

Murnau's second film, *Satanstoe*, released in 1919, was an interesting work consisting of three parts. The first episode was set in ancient Egypt. The second episode concerned the infamous Borgia family of medieval Italy. The third episode took place in Germany about 1917. The script for the film was by Robert Wiene. Veidt had a dual role in each episode. In the Egyptian tale, he was the Hermit from Elu, and also played the part of Lucifer. In the second story Veidt played the role of Gubetta, the Spaniard, and again also played Lucifer. In the final episode Veidt portrayed Ivan Grodski, and again played the role of the Devil. To separate each part of the film, Murnau had Veidt, in the role of Satan, open and close the curtain at the beginning and end of each episode. This bit of stagecraft was an indication of the film's close relationship to the legitimate theater.

Another entertaining film from 1919, which also consisted of more than one episode, was the five-part thriller *Unheimliche Geschichten* (Eerie Tales). This film, directed by Richard Oswald, was based on five strange and terrifying stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Steven-



One of 1919's most unusual films was *Unheimliche Geschichten* (Eerie Tales). Veidt played a different role in each of the five episodes. ABOVE: Veidt (left, with axe) played the role of the murderer in the segment "The Black Cat," based on a terrifying story by Edgar Allan Poe. BELOW: Veidt (at left) in the role of "Death" in the framing scenes. Shown with him is Anita Berber.



son, and other writers of the horror genre. These episodes were as eerie as the title indicates and proved to be fascinating viewing. Veidt appeared as a different character in each of the five episodes. Reinhold Schünzel was also featured in the cast.



Veidt's face has a most demoniacal expression in this still from the film *Unheimliche Geschichten* in an episode based on a story by Edgar Allan Poe.

Next, Conrad appeared in one of director Murnau's lesser efforts, a detective story with a banal plot, entitled *Abend-Nacht-Morgen* (Day, Night, and the Morning After). The film received scathing reviews, with only Veidt receiving favorable notices for his acting.

Also released in 1919 were the following above-average films: *Das Geheimnis von Bombay* (The Mystery of Bombay), with Lil Dagover; followed by *Der Graf von Cagliostro* (The Count of Cagliostro), with Veidt in the role of a hypnotist, and with Anita Berber and Reinhold Schünzel in the cast. Next came *Die Japanerin* (The Japanese Woman),



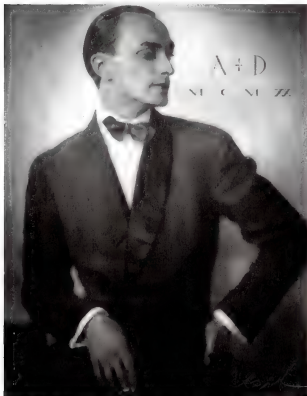
with Max Landa, and directed by E.A. Dupont; and then *Kurfürstendamm*, with the marvelous Asta Nielsen, and with Veidt again playing the Devil. Another film of some interest, released in Veidt's busy year of 1919, was *Opfer der Gesellschaft* (Society's Sacrifice), in which Veidt portrayed a bombastic prosecuting attorney with considerable elan.



In 1920, Veidt (right) took part in an early German-made adventure story *Das Geheimnis von Bombay* (The Secret of Bombay). Featured with him was Nien-Son-Ling (left).

The year 1919 was exceedingly busy for Conrad with his stage work and film work commitments. But Conrad still found time to make occasional special appearances such as the one held in the Beckstein Hall in Berlin on March 13, 1919. This was a recitation of selections from works of poetry and passages from stage plays. The program was entitled "Poetry of Ecstasy." For his performance Conrad chose to read selections from poetry by Rainier Maria Rilke and Franz Werfel, as well as extracts from Reinhard Goering's play, *The Sea Battle*. Conrad's recitation was well received by the large audience.

One of Veidt's last film releases of 1919 was a horror fantasy called *Nachtgestalten* (Figures of the Night). Director Oswald based this film on a ghost story by Karl Hans Strobl, the Edgar Allan Poe of Austria. Reviews of that period stated that Veidt gave an excellent performance as the Comedian. Other members of the distinguished cast included Paul



Tall, slim, poised, handsome, elegant, and sophisticated—Conrad poses for a profile publicity photograph in 1920.

Wegener, Reinhold Schünzel, Erna Morena, Anita Berber, Theodor Loos, and Erik Charell.

In 1920, Oswald directed and produced the fascinating film called *Der Reigen* (The Merry-Go-Round). This was released by the Oswald-Bioscop Company. The extraordinary cast included Veidt, who portrayed an evil blackmailer; and Asta Nielsen, the superb Danish actress (one of the first really international stars) who gave a memorable performance as a young girl forced into prostitution. Also rounding out the cast, with excellent supporting work, were Theodor Loos, Erna Morena, and Eduard von Winterstein. The film was based on a well-known story by Arthur Schnitzler.



In the 1920 morality drama *Der Reigen* (The Merry-Go-Round), Veidt had an opportunity to co-star with the marvelous Danish star, Asta Nielsen (left).

Speaking of Asta Nielsen, Veidt greatly admired and respected this marvelous actress. He participated in two films with her, *Der Reigen* and *Kurfürstendamm*. Veidt later had this comment: "I thoroughly enjoyed working in films with Asta Nielsen. Always while working in motion pictures, I missed that sense of 'live' reaction with an audience that I felt while acting on a stage in a theater. That most stimulating factor of the theater is lacking, namely, the interaction and fluidity of a living audience.



In 1920, Veidt gave a sometimes sly, sometimes menacing portrayal of the Devil in the fantasy-comedy *Kurfürstendamm*, directed by Richard Oswald.



In this dramatic scene from the 1919 film *Nachtgestalten*, we see Paul Wegener (left), Veidt and Anita Berber (center) and Erik Charell (right).

When I was in a play in a theater, and all was going well on stage, I felt that the audience and I were somehow joined into one. This is much different in a film studio, standing in front of a camera. But with Miss Nielsen, I could almost feel that I was on a real stage again. She was an actress whose strong fluidity as a female stage partner made up for the lack of a public audience. The right partner in a film is equal to half the audience!"

Also in 1920, *Moriturus, dem Tode geweiht* was released by Wörner-Films. Karl Hagen directed this early detective story, and Veidt's co-stars were Reinhold Schünzel, Max Landa, and Marga von Kierska.

One of the more fascinating films of 1920 was the Murnau-directed *Der Gang in die Nacht* (The Walk in the Night). The unusual story was scripted by Carl Mayer. Mayer was already justly famous for his part in the writing of "Caligari" and he would continue to write many excellent screenplays. The plot concerned three main characters: a doctor, his wife, and a blind artist. The story reached a climax as the doctor restores the artist's sight, and later learns that the artist he had helped is his wife's lover. When the artist's sight fails once more, his mistress pleads with her husband to attempt a second operation to save her lover's vision. Veidt excelled in the role of the blind artist, giving a restrained but highly effective performance. His co-stars were Erna Morena and Olaf Fönss, who gave first-class performances, too.

The German motion picture periodical *Film Kurier*, in its issue of December 30, 1910, gave a glowing review of this film and called it "a milestone in the art of the cinema." The article went on to laud the film's atmosphere, its excellent plot and psychological overtones, and the skill of the director and cast.

Even though Veidt was busy with a steady stream of film commitments in the early 1920s, he still found time to take part in a stage play at the Lessing Theater in Berlin. Opening on October 18, 1921, Veidt participated in the play *Der Lasterhafte Herr Tschu* (The Vicious Mr. Chu) together with his two good friends Elizabeth Bergner and Alexander Granach (who played the title role). Victor Barnowsky directed this successful play.

In the latter part of 1920 Veidt was given the leading role, a dual role, in the gripping German version of the famous Robert Louis Stevenson story of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which was entitled *Der Januskopf: eine Tragödie am Rande der Wirklichkeit* (The Janus Head: A Tragedy on the

Border of Reality). This photoplay was also shown under the names *Love's Mockery* and *Schrecken*. However, instead of being called Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the two main characters are called Dr. Warren and Mr. O'Connor. This was done so that royalties would not have to be paid for the rights to the story, as this was an unauthorized version. The director was Murnau and the scriptwriter was Hans Janowitz, of "Caligari" fame.

The story begins with Dr. Warren browsing in an antique store, where he purchases a strange statuette. The statuette is a bust of Janus, the Roman God with two faces. One face has a humane, benevolent appearance, while the other face has a wicked, satanic expression. Dr. Warren is haunted by thoughts of the Janus head and becomes possessed by it, changing against his will into the diabolical Mr. O'Connor. O'Connor commits several crimes, including the murder of a little girl; and the forcing of his own fiancée into prostitution. Finally O'Connor, realizing that he will be captured by the police, takes poison and falls to the ground, dead, but still clutching the hateful bust.

Also featured in a small role in this film was an actor who was still relatively unknown. I refer to Bela Lugosi, who was cast as the butler to Dr. Warren in *Der Januskopf*, and who a decade later would become a household name with his portrayal of Count Dracula.

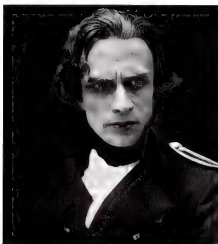


In this still photo from *Der Januskopf*, one can see the terror in the face of the Dr. Jekyll character as he senses his body is changing into the evil Mr. Hyde character.

One additional note about this film: because of the fact that the producer of the film did not receive advance approval and permission from the estate of Robert Louis Stevenson to use the plot of the story in the film, it has been reported that all prints of this interesting film were recalled, under pain of a civil lawsuit, and they were later destroyed. What a pity!

One final note about Conrad's film work in 1920: Veidt was cast in the role of Frederic Chopin. The film was entitled *Chopin* and was also exhibited under the German name of *Nocturno der Liebe*. Carl Boese was the director of this early cinemation of that famous composer's life.

From 1921 to 1926, several Veidt films of more than passing interest were released. Richard Oswald produced and directed *Lady Hamilton*, a fine historical drama based on the tempestuous love affair between Lord Horatio Nelson, the British naval hero of the battle of Trafalgar, and Lady Emma Hamilton. The very fine cast included Veidt, Werner Krauss, Liane Haid as Lady Hamilton, and Reinhold Schünzel. Veidt had the role of Lord Nelson, Lady Hamilton's lover, and he played that role with considerable élan.



Veidt gave a fine portrayal of the British naval hero, Lord Nelson, in the 1921 historical drama *Lady Hamilton*. Richard Oswald directed this period piece with a special flair.

Film-makers often work by the motto: "Don't film the facts; film the legend." This was the case with Oswald's 1922 version of the Lord Nelson-Lady Hamilton saga. Although not historically accurate, it did feature very fine acting by Veidt and a fascinating screenplay.

The sets were by Paul Leni, who did an outstanding job in this respect. Leni later became a top director of the period. Also noteworthy in this film was the unmatched photography work by Karl Freund. This film was a welcome relief for Veidt, allowing him to play a romantic role for a change, instead of his usual demoniacal roles.

Also released in 1921 and 1922 were the following photoplays. First was *Christian Wahnschaffe*, directed by Urban Gad (a well-known Danish director who made a name in German cinema) and having a cast boasting such fine players as Fritz Kortner, Werner Krauss, Theodor Loos, and with Conrad Veidt in the title role. Next was *Der Leidensweg der Inge Kraft* (The Suffering of Inge Kraft), co-starring Mia May; and then the thriller *Die Augen der Welt* (The Eyes of the World), with Ressel Orla; and next came *Kunstlerlaunen* (Temperamental Artist), with Aud Egede Nissen, and with a script by Carl Mayer.

On January 17, 1922, Conrad's mother died in Berlin. This was absolutely devastating to him as he was very close to her. Without his mother's help and encouragement, it is doubtful that Conrad would have become the cinematic legend that he was. Conrad's grief was inconsolable.

In 1922, the memorable film *Das Indische Grabmal* (The Indian Tomb) was produced with a budget of over 20 million marks. This was a tremendous amount of money for a film in those days and the director, Joe May, produced an extravagant and exciting adventure spectacle about India, with many thrills, wild animals, and much exotic scenery. The audiences loved it all. The cast of this cinema included Mia May, Erna Morena, Lya de Putti, Paul Richter, and Olaf Fönss. Veidt stood out in the role of the Prince of Eshnapur. Gunnar Tollnes assisted with the directorial duties. The screenplay was co-authored by Fritz Lang and his wife, Thea von Harbou. The feminine lead in this film, Mia May, was the wife of the director, Joe May.

On December 9, 1922, Conrad participated in a special stage presentation at the Alhambra Theater on Kurfürstendamm in Berlin. It was on a Saturday evening and the performance began at 11:30 p.m. The presentation was directed by Walter Karel and the cast of players read like a "Who's Who" of the German theater. Besides Veidt, other luminaries





In this still from the 1922 adventure story *Das Indische Grabmal*, Veidt (center) portrays the role of Prince of Eshnapur.

of the stage were Emil Jannings, Alexander Moissi, Werner Krauss, Wilhelm Dieterle, Lil Dagover, Gussy Holl, Heinrich George, and Harry Liedtke. The program consisted of a series of plays to be performed one play per Saturday evening on successive Saturdays. Conrad enjoyed this brief return to the legitimate theater in the midst of his busy film schedule.

The year 1923 saw the release of another excellent Richard Oswald historical pageant on film, *Lucrezia Borgia*. This work boasted the thespian services of Albert Bassermann (perhaps the dean of German actors, and winner of the coveted Iffland Ring for acting skill), and Paul Wegener, Alexander Granach, Heinrich George, Wilhelm Dieterle (who later became a noted director, moved to the United States and made several fine biographical films); and Anita Berber. Veidt had the important role of Cesare Borgia, while Bassermann played the role of the

Pope, Alexander VI. There is an unforgettable scene with Veidt and Bassermann in which Bassermann, as the Pope, gives a ringing denunciation of Cesare Borgia (Veidt). The film was a psychological study and story of the lives and loves and intrigues of the infamous Borgia family of ancient Italy. It was also a very expensive production for that day.

According to the legends, Cesare Borgia was a cruel and ruthless man, supposedly guilty of murdering several persons, including his own brother, and was allegedly guilty of incest with Lucrezia Borgia, his own sister. Veidt's characterization of Cesare Borgia emphasized the cruelty and treachery of Cesare. All in all, an unusual and fascinating film.



In this excellent historical pageant *Lucrezia Borgia*, released in 1923, Veidt (left) was cast in the role of Cesare Borgia. Here Veidt, as Cesare, shows a poison ampule to his co-star Alexander Granach, who is also involved in the intrigue and conspiracy in the film.

In at least four instances during this period, Veidt did more than simply act in his films. There were probably several more but I cannot document this with certainty. The first instance was in 1918 when Veidt directed the German film *Die Nacht auf Goldenhall*, in which Conrad had a dual acting role in the story also. The next instance was in 1920 when Veidt starred in *Wahnsinn* (Madness) and produced and directed it as well. His co-stars were Reinhold Schünzel and Grit Hegesa.



Another still from the film *Lucrezia Borgia*. Liane Haid (left) played the role of the notorious Lucrezia Borgia and Veidt portrayed her equally infamous brother, Cesare.

The story concerned a banker who suffers a mental breakdown. He later meets a gypsy who foretells that he will come across a certain trunk, which will have a special significance for the banker—either happiness or death. Later the banker becomes locked in the trunk and dies of suffocation. The film, under Veidt's direction, used a great deal of expressionistic lighting and scenery to convey the delusions the banker was having. Veidt's performance as the tragic banker, Lorenzen, was excellent. Veidt's first wife, Gussy Holl, had a small part in this fantasy film.

The highly respected British film historian, Roger Manvell, credits Veidt with another film from the silent film period. According to Manvell, Veidt was the guiding force in the making of the film *Lord Byron* in 1922. Manvell stated that Veidt not only starred in the title role but that he also directed, co-produced and wrote the screenplay! Apparently, no prints of this film still exist. I have been unable to corroborate in any other film history reference books the actual production of this film nor was I able to ascertain the names of other cast members.

Then again in 1923, Veidt tried his hand at the executive branch of film-making; this time he co-produced, with Richard Oswald, the film *Paganini*, with Veidt also acting the title role of the violinist, Nicolo Paganini. His co-stars were Alexander Granach (a dedicated and extremely talented actor), Eva May, and Martin Herzberg.

Unfortunately, very little is known about these four motion pictures and there are no prints of them available anywhere, to the best of my knowledge. The above information comes from an interview Conrad gave to a film magazine feature writer in the 1920s.

On those occasions when Veidt directed his films, he experimented with various approaches to camera usage. Veidt had learned the importance of innovative camerawork from his good friend, actor/director Paul Wegener. Wegener had once stated in a valuable precept for a budding director: "The only real writer in a film must be the camera." Veidt found this to be good advice.

In Europe, for many, many years, a certain political joke (with more than a grain of truth in it) has been told and re-told at the fashionable diplomatic parties. It states that: "In England, everything that is not prohibited is permitted. In Germany, everything that is not permitted is



In 1923, Veidt produced and starred in the biographical film *Paganini*. Veidt played the title role of Nicolo Paganini, the Italian composer and violin virtuoso.

prohibited. In France, everything that is prohibited is permitted. In Russia, everything that is permitted is prohibited."

An exception to the above theory might be the capital city of Germany after World War I. Berlin in the 1920s was a bizarre phenomenon. It was an aberration of depravity—a grotesque example of hedonism at its worst. It was a place where everything was permitted, no matter how strange or perverted. Just about any form of pleasure could be purchased. There seemed to be a feverish and never-ending search for relief from the overwhelming problems and sorrows of postwar life. This temporary relief was supplied in the form of alcoholic beverages, narcotics, and sexual experiences. It was a modern Sodom and Gomorrah, with a German accent.

Veidt was a witness to this turbulent period, and became a participant in the dissolute activities. After his marriage to Gussy Holl had failed in 1919, Conrad fell victim to a severe depression. In order to draw him out of this depressed state, Conrad's friends and co-workers began a concerted effort to invite Conrad to parties and other social get-togethers. Max Reinhardt's theater was located only a few blocks from Friedrichstrasse, the long boulevard which was the center for the hedonistic activities of those days. The street was filled with bars, cheap amusement centers, casinos, and dimly-lit cabarets, with their attendant population of prostitutes, both female and male. Also in attendance along Friedrichstrasse were a multitude of very young girls and boys whose services could also be purchased for erotic purposes. In the cabarets, female impersonators and transvestites performed their vulgar routines. Conrad and his friends indulged in many decadent experiences and excesses that were common to this period.

One major reason for the great abundance of prostitutes, young and old, male as well as female, was the horrendous poverty and abject misery of the people in postwar Germany. The inflation in Germany produced a nightmare. People's savings were wiped out; pensions became worthless. The German mark fell to an all-time low value in which a loaf of bread or a bottle of milk actually cost *billions* of marks!

Proper young girls who came from good families were forced to sell their bodies for food. Men and women, distraught and overwhelmed by the misery of their lives, turned to narcotics for relief. The suffering of the people was beyond belief.

Conrad and the other actors of the Reinhardt Theater normally passed



During the making of the film *Paganini* in 1922, Veidt was photographed with members of the cast and production crew. Sitting, from left: Veidt, director Heinz Goldberg, actress Eva May, and cameramen Stefan Lorant and Karl Voss. (Courtesy of Stefan Lorant)

through this area, going to and from work, as Friedrichstrasse was an important thoroughfare in Berlin. They would often stop off at some bar on Friedrichstrasse after a long day of rehearsals at the theater.

This postwar period was a time of excesses. Victorian morals were abandoned by a large portion of the German populace. The new attitude seemed to be "pleasure at any price" and "anything goes." A sad example of the typical decadent lifestyle of Berlin in the 1920s was that of a promising young actress who took part in ten silent films with Veidt. This was the notorious Anita Berber. Berber was a talented actress and quite pretty, and she might have achieved an enviable career in Germany's golden age of films. Instead she chose to dissipate the brief remainder of her life by her eager participation in the debauchery of this saturnalian era in Berlin. She became addicted to cocaine and morphine; danced completely nude on the stages of cheap Berlin nightspots such as the White Mouse cabaret; became involved in several lesbian love affairs, as well as promiscuity with numerous men; and was involved in many

vulgar brawls and disturbances. Miss Berber's sad, brief life ended at the age of 28.

A break in Veidt's self-destructive pattern of living, however, occurred in the latter part of December, 1922. Conrad had been invited to an exclusive party at a large mansion on Kurfürstendamm. The host was a wealthy businessman who considered himself a patron of the arts. He liked to throw large parties and invite members of the theatrical profession, as well as artists, sculptors, musicians, etc. In addition, there were usually a great number of the rich, the famous, and the titled nobility at these gala affairs. As Conrad mingled with the guests that evening he was introduced to a very attractive and charming young lady named Felicitas Radke. Conrad was very much taken with her beauty and her cool poise, while Felicitas was equally drawn to the tall, handsome actor with the hypnotic eyes. Conrad asked Felicitas for a dance, and then another dance, and then another. Later in the evening Conrad escorted her to her home and asked if he might call on her the next day, to which Felicitas acquiesced. Over the next several months they saw each other almost every day, and this courting continued, culminating in Conrad's second marriage in April, 1923.

After Conrad's meeting with Felicitas, and their subsequent dating, Conrad's friends noticed, with strong approval, the radical change in Veidt. They noted that his depression had evaporated, his heavy drinking had ceased, and his patronage of the diversions of Friedrichstrasse had stopped completely.

# 10

## Conrad's Second Marriage and the Birth of His Daughter

EARLY IN 1923, a happy event occurred for Conrad: his second marriage. His new bride was Felicitas Radke, a lovely lady who had no professional connection with the stage or films. Felicitas came from a cultured and aristocratic old German family. This marriage was more successful; Conrad and Felicitas were quite happy together for a long time, and the union produced a daughter, Vera Viola Maria. Veidt was very happy with his wife and young child (Conrad absolutely adored the little girl, Viola); and he was kept busy with his cinema commitments and occasional stage productions. There was much traveling for Veidt, from cinema location to location.

As Veidt became more famous there was considerable talk of film offers for him from all of the major film-making countries. Most, of course, coming from Germany and Austria, but also some from France, England, Sweden, Italy, and even some from the United States.

One odd cinematic coincidence in Veidt's career was his participation in *both* filmed versions of the story of William Tell, the legendary Swiss mountaineer who resisted the authority of the tyrant, Gessler. The first cinema production, entitled simply *William Tell*, was a silent film and was released by AAFA Films in 1923. Along with Veidt, the cast included Erna Morena, Otto Gebuhr, and Eduard von Winterstein. The second version, entitled *The Legend of William Tell*, released in 1934 by Terra Films, was a sound film. Hans Marr had the title role, and Veidt played the part of the tyrant Gessler (in both films). Also in this cast was Emmy Sonnemann (later to become the wife of Marshal Hermann Göring). This second version of the Tell legend was also the *last* German language film made by Veidt. Rudolf Dworsky directed the 1923 version and Heinz Paul directed the sound version. Unfortunately, neither film version lived up to



the promise one might expect from a chronicling of the William Tell legend. Both films were dull and slow in movement.



Conrad and his second wife, Felicitas, are seen here sightseeing in the Bavarian Alps of Germany in 1923. Conrad and his new bride visited Garmisch, Germany and Innsbruck, Austria while on their two-week honeymoon.



Conrad and his pretty wife, Felicitas, at their home in Berlin, about 1926.

In the latter part of 1923, Veidt starred in the German film *Liebstaumel* (Love and Passion), playing the role of a gypsy. This provocative film was directed by Martin Hartwig, and Veidt's co-star was Maria Zelenka.

Then in early 1924, Veidt was cast in the role of Count Wranna in the film *Das Verlorene Paradies* (The Lost Paradise). Also featured in this drama were Lucy Doraïne and Eduard von Winterstein. Later in 1924, Veidt had two major successes in films: *The Hands of Orlac* and *Waxworks*.

The gripping thriller *The Hands of Orlac* was produced in Austria by Pan Film Co. and it was directed by the director of "Caligari," Robert Wiene. The film was based on the popular French novel by Maurice Renard. This science fiction story predicts the wonders of surgical transplants of the future. It concerned a noted concert pianist, Paul Orlac (Veidt) whose hands are severed in a terrible train wreck. Later, a surgeon grafts the hands of an executed strangler onto Orlac's wrists. During his recovery period, Orlac feels an overpowering urge to kill. Orlac believes he is possessed with the mind of the murderous strangler, as well as with the criminal's hands. Subsequently, there are several unsolved murders in

the area and Orlac believes he is guilty of them. It is all a fiendish plot to drive Orlac insane, however. Although the plot is far-fetched, Veidt's performance was outstanding. Veidt had excellent support from Fritz Kortner and Alexandra Sorina. The film was well received by both the public and the film critics. The story was remade years later into two other versions, which were much less successful than Veidt's rendition.

As a bit of film trivia, I might add that when *The Hands of Orlac* was first exhibited in Vienna in 1924, Veidt was invited to attend the premiere performance, and he did so. However, Wiene's horror fantasy reportedly caused many women in the audience to faint and dozens of men protested to the theater manager about the gruesome subject matter of the film. The disturbance became so great that the manager, in desperation, implored Veidt to speak to the people in the audience and try to calm them. Although Veidt was doubtful of his ability to placate the near-riotous audience, he agreed to try. He walked out on center stage, held up his hands for silence, and proceeded to speak. Somehow, by the force of his personality as well as the logic of his words, Conrad was able to calm the audience and pacify the protesters. What's more, to his amazement, he received a huge ovation from the now tranquil audience. The film itself went on to a successful run at this theater, as well as throughout Austria and Germany.



Veidt gave a marvelous performance in the psychological study *The Hands of Orlac*. The film, released in 1924, told the story of a man who is led to believe that he is a murderer.

In 1924, the German documentary film *Der Film im Film* was released. It was directed by Friedrich Porges and covered the development of cinematography from the very beginning up to 1924. It featured shots of the best-known film directors and film stars at work in the film studios, with a running commentary about their work, in sub-titles. Some of the actors featured were Conrad Veidt, Werner Krauss, Emil Jannings, Henny Porten, Erna Morena, and Max Linder. Some of the directors shown were Fritz Lang, Richard Oswald, E.A. Dupont, F.W. Murnau, and Ernst Lubitsch. This documentary gave a fascinating glimpse into the work of those top-flight directors and actors in the Germany of that early but very productive period in film history.

Also well received by both film critics and the theater-going public was another important film, one which added much luster to Veidt's growing renown as an intense and gifted actor. This was *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett*, shown abroad in the United States simply as *Waxworks*, with the director being Paul Leni. The "framing story" unfolds as a young man enters a wax museum to write some publicity material about the exhibits there. While there, he falls asleep and dreams that three of the wax figures come to life before his eyes. These three figures from the exhibits are Ivan the Terrible of Russia (Veidt); Jack the Ripper (Werner Krauss); and the caliph, Haroun al Rashid (Emil Jannings). Veidt put such intensity into his role of the sadistic Tsar Ivan that his performance stood out, completely overshadowing the other actors, even though the superb actors, Jannings and Krauss, had the two other principal roles and were marvelous in their performances. Wilhelm Dieterle, later a director of note in Hollywood, played an important role in this film also, that of the young writer who dreamed about the three wax figures coming to life.

After the framing story has begun, we then see three episodes, one with each of the three historical characters mentioned. The episode about Ivan the Terrible emphasizes his extreme cruelty and his predilection for torturing his victims, physically and mentally. For example, at one point Ivan stops a procession leaving a wedding chapel, and he confronts the happy newly-wed couple. He then orders the bridegroom to the torture chamber and forces the young bride to be his own bed partner for the night. On other occasions, after poisoning some victims, Ivan makes them watch an hourglass that is presumably an indication of the exact moment of their death, when the sands have run out. Later Ivan finally goes mad when his enemies cause him to believe that he himself has been poisoned



One of Veidt's best performances was that of Czar Ivan the Terrible in the 1924 German film *Waxworks*. Veidt received much acclaim for his brilliant portrayal of the sadistic Russian czar.

fatally and they set a similar hourglass (marked with the name "Ivan" on it) in front of him. This scene, where the deranged Ivan constantly turns the hourglass over and over, in hopes of somehow delaying his death, is a marvelous tour de force of acting skill by Veidt, as well as outstanding screenplay work. Veidt managed to delineate the sadism and the deteriorating mind of Ivan in this scene and throughout the film with rarely equalled skill. The gripping intensity of Veidt's portrayal was a major factor in the success of this exceptionally fine film and was widely acclaimed by critics.

It has been reported by a noted film critic that Veidt's compelling performance as Tsar Ivan the Terrible in *Waxworks* in 1924 had a definite influence on the Russian director, Sergei Eisenstein's conception and realization of the role of Ivan in his 1946 masterpiece.



Veidt, as Count Wranza, is seen here in a dramatic moment from the 1924 melodrama *Schicksal* (Fate) with co-stars Lia Eibenschütz (left) and Lucy Dorsaine (right).

Waxworks was important to Conrad for another reason. In 1925 John Barrymore saw Veidt's performance in this film and was very much impressed with his acting skills. Barrymore immediately cabled Veidt an invitation to come to America to co-star with him in a forthcoming American film. The cablegram was most cordial. It read, in part, as follows: "You are one of the most talented men in the film world. You don't know me but I want you to come to Hollywood. Need you urgently for my picture *The Beloved Rogue*. Think you ideal for part of King Louis XI. You must come. I won't make the picture without you." Veidt was unable to resist such a charming offer and he decided to accept. This excellent opportunity to come to America and appear in Barrymore's film was the first of Conrad's two visits to America. The resulting film, *The Beloved Rogue*, was to be a great success for both John Barrymore and Conrad Veidt. But Conrad had to complete some film commitments in Europe before he could leave for America.

Still another fine historical piece by Richard Oswald in 1924 was *Carlos and Elizabeth*, with Veidt in a dual role; that of Don Carlos and also of Don Carlos' grandfather, King Charles V of Spain. This film was based on

the play by Johann Schiller. The setting for this fascinating drama was Spain at the time of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, and of the hated Inquisition. Richard Oswald directed and produced this superior film.

Then later that same year Paul Czinner combined the very gifted talents of Veidt, Emil Jannings, and Elizabeth Bergner (who later became Czinner's wife) in an engrossing love triangle story called *Nju* (also known as *Husbands and Lovers*) which was released by Primax Films and was based on the widely-read novel of the period by Ossip Dymow. The story was a very simple one, centering almost entirely on the three listed characters, and the film was a critical success. The plot revolves around Elizabeth Bergner, who plays a married woman who is sexually frustrated and dissatisfied with her slovenly, vulgar husband (Jannings). When a handsome stranger (Veidt) happens to walk by her house and pauses there on the street below, looking up at her window, the wife feels a strange attraction to the man staring at her. The stranger then meets the wife, and later seduces her, and she leaves her husband and child to become the mistress of the stranger. Later the stranger grows tired of her and leaves her, heartlessly advising her to return to her husband! Left



Veidt had a dual role in the 1924 German-made historical love story *Carlos and Elisabeth*. The setting was Spain at the time of the Inquisition. Veidt (center) was cast as Don Carlos and as King Charles V. Wilhelm Dieterle (left) and Aud Egede Nissen (right) were also featured in this interesting film.

without her husband or her lover, the young woman feels doomed and commits suicide by throwing herself over a cliff.

The unusual title of this film, *Nju*, is derived from the name of the central character, the feminine lead, appealingly played by Elizabeth Bergner.



Also in 1924, Veidt appeared in the tragic story of a love triangle, entitled *Nju*. Emil Jannings (left) was cast as the husband of Elizabeth Bergner. Veidt (right) portrayed the cynical poet who seduces Bergner and then heartlessly deserts her.

To digress for a moment: in regard to Veidt's exclusive contract with Richard Oswald, Veidt used to relish telling a little anecdote on himself, from his early screen days in Germany. It seems that in 1918, Veidt had accepted a very lucrative film offer and was making a film in Berlin for another film company, in spite of the fact that this was forbidden by his exclusive contract with Oswald. For this film, a large garden scene was needed and Veidt and other film workers scouted around and found what seemed to be the ideal spot for their purposes in Grünerwald Park. Upon locating the best spot in Grünerwald for the film shooting, Veidt then went to the door of the villa there and rang the bell. He asked the maid of the house if it would be permissible for his company to complete some film shooting there in their garden area. The maid answered that she



would ask the owner, Mr. Oswald. Veidt did not wait for an answer but took to his heels, taking his whole film crew with him!

Conrad also delighted in telling another little joke at his own expense. This concerned his early days as an apprentice actor and extra on the stage of the Deutsches Theater in Berlin. Conrad was a member of the chorus in this particular Max Reinhardt production and his only scheduled vocal contribution to the performance was an occasional shout. He felt so frustrated at this insignificant little offering that he spoke to the chorus master about the matter. Conrad offered to pay the chorus master a small sum of money (it had to be a small sum—in those days Conrad could barely afford to pay for food, shelter, and clothing!) for the privilege of speaking one line; just one line that normally the chorus master would utter. Pocketing the money offered, the chorus master agreed to this arrangement but insisted that it be for just one performance. Conrad delivered his one sentence and then returned to his place at the rear of the chorus, feeling much better.



This picture illustrates two famous facial features of Veidt's: the vein in his forehead that often became noticeably enlarged when Veidt was performing in an angry or highly emotional scene; and the monocle he wore when playing the role of a European nobleman.

Veidt had the uncommon ability to laugh at himself. Although an internationally-known actor, of great artistic stature, Conrad never took himself too seriously. I quote the above two stories to illustrate Veidt's penchant for frequently telling stories about himself which belittled his accomplishments as an actor or director.

Getting back to Veidt's films, another film that was out of the ordinary was the 1923 release *Liebe macht Blind* (Love Makes One Blind). Veidt's co-stars in this motion picture were Lil Dagover, Emil Jannings, Jenny Jugo, Lillian Hall-Davis, and George Alexander. Lothar Mendes directed this amusing film for UFA. This good-natured bit of entertainment was based on an old French marital farce. Lil Dagover had the dual role of the wife and the flirtatious woman who tries to attract her husband, Dr. Lamare (Veidt). Emil Jannings is seen in a smaller part in this diverting comedy.



Veidt gave an impressive performance as the fanatic preacher, Helgum, in the 1925 Swedish film *Ingmarssarvet*. The film was shot on location in the Holy Land and told the true story of Swedish peasants who emigrated to Jerusalem in the early years of this century.

Veidt's only screen work in Sweden was in the excellent Swedish film *Ingmarsarvet* (Ingmar's Inheritance) released in late 1925. Parts of this film were shot on location in Jerusalem and other parts of the Holy Land. Although not the leading star of the film, Veidt gave an inspired performance in the role of Helgum, the fanatic preacher who stirred the emigration of Swedish peasants to Jerusalem. The film was based on the classic novel by Selma Lagerlöf, entitled *Jerusalem*. The story was based on true events and some of the children of the Swedish emigrants of those days are still alive today and living in the Holy Land.

Later in 1925, two events transpired which were of great importance to Veidt. One was the making of the excellent film *Der Geiger von Florenz* (The Violinist from Florence). This was a superior film which added much to Veidt's film laurels. But the second event was of even more



In 1925, UFA released the superior psychological study *The Violinist of Florence*. Veidt (left) was cast as the father and Elizabeth Bergner (right) played the role of his headstrong daughter. Reviews of the film were quite favorable.

importance to Veidt himself: this being the birth of his only child, his daughter Vera Viola Maria, in Berlin. In the middle of August, 1925, while Veidt was working on location in Italy in the making of *Der Geiger von Florenz*, he received word that his wife Felicitas had given birth to a child on the 10th of August. Conrad could not leave at once, as he wished to do, but had to remain there in Italy for the last few crucial scenes to be filmed. When finally he was able to leave, he took the first train to Germany, arriving at the hospital in Berlin, exhausted, and not even taking the time to change his clothes or to freshen up after the long trip. Once there he visited his wife, Felicitas, and inquired about how she was feeling, and thanked her for the pretty little daughter.

After talking with Felicitas for quite a while, Conrad went to see his daughter. From that moment on he had eyes only for Viola. The little girl, with the very pretty blond hair, was lying in her tiny bed, covering up her eyes with her little hands. Veidt was so moved by the scene that he cried.

The name Viola was suggested by her godmother, the famous actress Elizabeth Bergner. Miss Bergner had considerable success in playing the

BERLIN  
KUNSTFÜHRERDAMM 139

*Am 10. August 1925 nachmittags  
5½ Uhr wurde ich geboren. An  
diesem Tage erlebte mich meine  
Mama Felicitas Veidt, geb. Rodde  
meinen Papa, Conrad Veidt.  
Beide sind sehr, sehr glücklich.  
Ich auch.*

*Viola, Vera-Maria Veidt*

Lehmann, Berlin, Photographie (17).

Copies of this birth announcement were sent to relatives and friends of the Veidt family in 1925. The wording is phrased as though Viola is making the announcement. It translates loosely as follows: "On August 10, 1925, at 5:15 p.m., I was born. On this day my birth was a present to my parents, Felicitas and Conrad. They are very, very happy. Me too." Viola

part of "Viola" in Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*, and Conrad and Felicitas both liked the name and agreed to add it to the baby's already selected name of Vera Maria. The name Viola stuck, and became the preferred first name. Viola was also nicknamed "Kiki" later. She would grow up to be a beautiful woman who would later marry and move from Europe to America, and reside in the area of Coral Gables and Key West, Florida.

Conrad learned later that Viola was born on a hot August afternoon at the "Käse Klinik," or "Cheese Clinic," in Berlin. This nickname was given jestingly to the hospital because its founders and owners were two very well-known obstetricians whose names were Dr. *Maimzer* and Dr. *Limburger!* Incidentally, Marlene Dietrich's daughter, Heidede, was also born at this same hospital.

As Conrad was away on location in Italy, he was not the first family member to come to the hospital to see Felicitas and her baby. The first relative to visit was Felicitas' mother, Mrs. Radke, who loved animals devotedly and was a dedicated horse and dog breeder and raiser. Mrs. Radke took one look at the little baby girl and reportedly said, "You must admit, Felicitas, that a colt or a puppy are far more attractive!"

At that time the Veidt family was residing in a large, lovely apartment at #150 Kurfürstendamm, a very fashionable neighborhood. Mrs. Radke stayed for several days at the Veidt residence to help her daughter and granddaughter after their arrival home from the hospital.

Soon after arriving home from the hospital with her new baby, Felicitas and her mother, Frau Radke, received a telegram. It was addressed to "Baby Veidt" and it read: "I heartily congratulate you on your birth and your parents." It was signed "Max Reinhardt."

Incidentally, Viola told me that her godfather was the famous actor, and long-time friend of the Veidt family, Emil Jannings.

After a brief visit with his family in Berlin, Veidt returned to the film location in Italy and completed the work on *Der Geiger von Florenz*. This UFA film was masterfully directed by Paul Czinner, and it co-starred Elizabeth Bergner and Walter Rilla with Veidt. The story concerned a young woman, a step-daughter (Miss Bergner) who is jealous of her step-mother. The girl is sent away to a school in Switzerland but she runs away from that school to Italy. In order to get past the Italian border guards, the girl changes into boys' clothing. Veidt gave a splendid performance as the girl's father, but his role was secondary in importance and scope to Elizabeth Bergner's part. Bergner wasn't very believable as a



Another still from *The Violinist of Florence* shows Veidt in a tender scene with Bergner.

boy but otherwise the film was quite good and the reviews of the day were quite favorable. The film was shown in Germany and Austria as *Der Geiger von Florenz*. On being exhibited in England and America, however, it was given the somewhat inane title of *Impetuous Youth*.

In 1925, Veidt went to Paris for the French-produced (Cine-France Co.) film, *Le Comte Kostia*, with Veidt in the role of Count Kostia. Jacques Robert was the director of this film, and Abel Gance, who later became famous for his direction of the innovative film *Napoleon*, assisted in the production of the film. Veidt's co-stars were Andre Nox and Lilian Constantini.

Conrad was often asked by his many fans a two-part question: "What is it like when you are acting? How do you do it?" Veidt usually answered these two questions thusly: "For this I can not give an exact recipe or a precise time-table, such as some modern teachers of the art of acting may prefer. I only know this. I see the role to be played with my spiritual, inner eyes. Or my imagination, if you prefer. I do my utmost never to lose that picture from my mind. Once I have visualized the character in the role, I try to keep it through the long process of the technical fabrication of the film. This picture in my mind supplies the general appearance of the person to be portrayed, as well as his walk, his hairstyle, his make-up, his



Veidt is pictured here in the title role of Count Kostia in the 1925 French drama, *Le Comte Kostia*.

voice characteristics, and other aspects of his image. Whether the cinema is a horror film, or a comedy, or a film portraying the sadness of human life, or an adventure film or a fantasy cinema, or whatever type of motion picture it is, I always try to represent in pantomime a definite artistic and humanly correct picture. If I succeed in this and the members of the theater are pleased with my work and the resulting film, then I will have fulfilled a part of my artistic life work."

Incidentally, I understand that in late 1925, the director Ludwig Berger wanted Veidt for the important and coveted role of Mephistopheles in his planned film adaptation of the legend of Faust. I believe that Veidt would have given an extraordinary performance as Mephistopheles. But this was not to be. What happened was that Emil Jannings, who wanted the part for himself, arranged to meet with Erich Pommer, the head of UFA

studios, and he persuaded Pommer that he, Jannings, would be ideal for the part of Mephistopheles. Pommer eventually agreed to this, and not only replaced Veidt with Jannings, but also replaced Ludwig Berger with F.W. Murnau as the film's director.

The resulting film, *Faust*, released in 1926 by UFA, was an above average film. Oddly enough, this film was appreciated more by audiences abroad—in America, Britain, and France—than it was in its homeland, Germany.

It is totally useless, I know, to wonder and daydream a bit about what *might have been*. But it is also pleasant to engage in conjecture; to speculate whether this film, *Faust*, would have been any better if Ludwig Berger had directed it and Veidt had portrayed Mephistopheles, as originally planned.



A publicity photo taken of Veidt in 1926.



Incidentally, I should mention that Veidt did act in the legend of Faust, but on the stage, not on the screen. He was a member of the cast of Max Reinhardt's extraordinary production of *Faust*, and he received rave notices for his performance.

In any event, I have cited this bit of film trivia to point up the continuous and relatively good-natured rivalry that existed between Jannings and Veidt throughout a good portion of their long cinema careers. Each one, naturally, was hoping to receive the better acting roles throughout their impressive and remarkable careers. Sometimes Veidt won the desired role; sometimes Jannings was the victor. But they remained friends in spite of this rivalry.

There was a pronounced difference in the style of acting between Jannings and Veidt. Veidt gave a sensitive, restrained and subtle, yet eloquent performance which contrasted with Jannings' rather gross and posuring style of emoting. In addition to the difference in acting style, there was also one other noticeable difference. Whereas Jannings would attempt to forcefully and aggressively influence the casting process for the best roles, seeking out the top man at the studio and offering many "facts" as to why he, Jannings, would be a better choice for the lead, Veidt would simply take whatever was offered, with no complaints or unpleasant wrangling.



Veidt (right) as the prosecutor, with Harry Liedtke (left) in the sex education film *Der Kreuzzug des Weibes* (*The Crusade of the Wives*), released in 1926. The theme of the film was a protest against illegal abortions.

# 11

## A Huge Success: The Student of Prague

THE YEAR 1926 was to be a banner year for Conrad for several reasons. One was the distinguished and memorable film, *The Student of Prague*. This was the second version of this fine story. Paul Wegener had starred in and helped to write the screenplay for the *first* version in 1913, while Adolf Wohlbrück was the Student in the third version of 1935. Here Veidt portrayed the student Baldwin, a tragic figure who was beset by a pursuing double of himself. Werner Krauss played, with his usual facility and skill, a sinister role as the magical money lender, Scapinelli. Veidt's acting in this silent film has been praised highly and is considered by many film critics to be among the high points of screen pantomime. It is generally also agreed among film critics that Veidt gave the *definitive* portrayal of *The Student of Prague*, in his 1926 version.

The plot, briefly stated, concerns the young student Baldwin (Veidt) who wishes to marry a rich and titled young lady, the Countess Margit. But marriage between them would ordinarily be out of the question, due to the differences in their stations in life. So when Baldwin is approached by the Devil (in this film he is called Scapinelli, cunningly played by Werner Krauss) he agrees to exchange his soul (his mirror-image self) to Satan. In the excellent screenplay, Baldwin signs an agreement with the devil, for which he is to receive unlimited wealth and a marriage with the exquisite young countess he loves.

In exchange, the devil will obtain Baldwin's soul. The director, Henrik Galeen, and his scriptwriter incorporated the clever idea of having the mirror image of Baldwin step out of the mirror and become a separate living entity, able to follow Baldwin at will. Later Baldwin discovers the evil mirror image is haunting him continuously, and run though he may, he cannot elude the "doppelgänger." In German idiom, the term "doppelgänger" denotes a person's double, but it also means an image

or reflection that has an *independent* existence. Eventually, in a dramatic confrontation with the mirror image, Baldwin tries to kill his other self but ends up committing suicide.

This famous tale has been told many times before and since this film, in the legend of Johann Faust, and in other productions, both on the stage and in motion pictures. The story is based on the plays by Marlowe and Goethe and on an opera by Gounod. It was also based loosely on two other sources: a story by Hans Heinz Ewers; and on an old story by Edgar Allan Poe—one of his lesser-known stories called *Mr. William Wilson*.

Whatever the derivation and origin of the screenplay for this extraordinary film, *The Student of Prague*, with Veidt in the title role, was one of the best expressions of this fascinating theme ever produced. Veidt gave one of the most compelling performances of his entire remarkable career. An additional bonus was the fact that the film showed the authentic background and scenery of the historic and distinctive city of Prague.

To illustrate the high quality of this production, let me insert a brief review from the respected periodical, *The National Board of Review Magazine*, dated February, 1929. "Conrad Veidt in the stellar part of Baldwin, the student, faces and overcomes the handicap of playing a dual role. To our mind, it is his best performance in any of his pictures shown in America. Certainly, the final sequence of his vain flight from his ever-pursuing image and the life and death climax before the shattered mirror is one of the finest achievements of screen pantomime and camera magic."

Veidt's mesmerizing performance in this milestone motion picture, as the student who made a pact with the devil, will long be remembered by film historians and screen buffs.

In the early part of 1926, Veidt was asked by a theatrical impresario to appear on stage in several cities in Germany. As Conrad was "between films" at that particular time, he readily agreed. One of his solo stage appearances on this tour was at the Park-Kino Theater in Berlin on April 25, 1926. There Conrad gave emotive readings from selected works by Goethe, Heine, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Werfel. The theater was sold out that evening and the audience applauded heartily at the conclusion of Veidt's performance.



Scenes from the 1926 Faustian fantasy *The Student of Prague*. ABOVE: Veidt as Baldwin, the student who sells his soul to the devil to gain wealth and the hand of the aristocratic woman he loves. BELOW: Baldwin lies dying near his shattered mirror image. The inscription later placed on his gravestone read "He played with the Devil and lost!"



In 1926, Veidt was offered the title role in the Italian production of the Nerofilm *Enrico IV*. Veidt's portrayal of Henry IV had much merit and the film was well directed by Amleto Palermi. Also featured in the film were Agnes Esterhazy and Angelo Ferrari. This motion picture was exhibited in Germany and Austria under the titles of *Die Flucht in die Nacht* and *Die Lebende Maske*.



Veidt (left) was cast in the role of Count Heinrich in the 1926 Italian film *Enrico IV*. Also featured in this absorbing psychological drama was Paul Biensfeld (right).

The last Veidt films that were produced in Germany before Veidt left for America were the following silents. Early in 1926 Veidt had a dual role, and gave a very sensitive performance, in an interesting photoplay entitled *Die Brüder Schellenberg*. It was a story of two very different brothers. The younger brother, a wealthy financier, is a womanizer who nearly ruins a young woman's life. The older brother, a philanthropist who operates a welfare center for needy persons, saves the young woman's life. In addition to this main plot, the film also tried to depict through realism how thoroughly miserable life was in the post-war Germany of the early 1920s. Liane Haid played the part of the young

woman mentioned, and others in the fine cast were Lil Dagover and Frieda Richard. The very able direction was by Karl Grönne.



Released in 1926, the social drama *The Brothers Schellenberg* starred Veidt in a dual role. The film gave Veidt an opportunity to present a sensitive portrayal of two very different brothers. The film also gave a realistic view of Germany in the post-World War I period, depicting the misery, hunger, and social and political unrest in the country.

Another stimulating and provocative film of that year was *Dürfen wir Schweigen?* (Should We Be Silent?), with Fritz Kortner and Walter Rilla. Then came the photoplay *Ssanin*, a Vitafilm, directed by Friedrich Feher (who was the deranged storyteller in "Caligari"). And finally, *Der Kreuzzug des Weibes* (The Crusade of the Wives) or, as it was also known, *Unwelcome Children*, which co-starred Werner Krauss. The theme of this last named film was intended as a protest against illegal abortions.

In 1926, the French film genius Abel Gance wanted Veidt for the role of the Marquis de Sade, in Gance's forthcoming masterpiece *Napoleon*. Preliminary inquiries were made between Gance's casting assistant and Veidt's agent. But, as Fate would have it, this casting assignment was not to be, and Veidt left Europe that year for America at the request of John Barrymore, for a three-year sojourn. I can well imagine what an outstanding performance Veidt would have given in the role of de Sade.



In 1926, Veidt starred in the Richard Oswald-directed sex education film *Dürfen wir Schweigen?* (Should We Be Silent?). Veidt (shown in this still with Elga Brink) was cast as the artist, Paul Hartwig.

# 12

## The Veidts Visit America

IT WAS IN SEPTEMBER, 1926, that Conrad and his family sailed from Europe to the United States on the luxury liner *SS Mauretania* to accept John Barrymore's cordial invitation to Hollywood. Conrad was already famous as a Shakespearean actor on the stage in Europe, as well as a noted motion picture star on the Continent, and he was familiar with European theater and cinema methods. But this was to be his first introduction to Hollywood techniques and the American style of living. They arrived in New York on September 24, 1926.

From New York Conrad and his small party (Felicita, Viola, and Viola's governess, Dedda) boarded the express train for Los Angeles. Conrad thoroughly enjoyed the long trip across the country, appreciating the varied scenery and the opportunity to see something of America. To him, this was a small vacation—a much-needed break in the heavy schedule of cinema and stage work he had been under in Europe. Conrad and Felicitas were both amazed at the immensity of the United States as days and nights passed before they reached Hollywood. To Conrad, the six days spent in crossing the Atlantic and the four days taken to traverse the United States were a welcome change, a chance to be with his wife and child, with no business cares or pressures.

Conrad expected to be in Hollywood for that one Barrymore film, *The Beloved Rogue*. But as it turned out, Conrad stayed in America for two and a half years, and starred in three more films as well. In addition to Barrymore's invitation, Veidt was eagerly sought out by the astute head of Universal Pictures, Carl Laemmle, Sr. Laemmle, born in Germany, was well aware of Veidt's tremendous international reputation as a German actor of the highest caliber.

From the time Conrad left Berlin on his way to America in September 1926, he decided to write a diary to his little daughter, Viola. In it, he





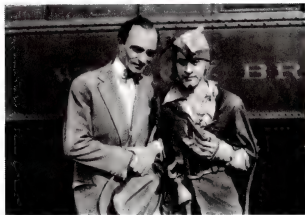
Here we see Conrad and his daughter, Viola, who is about one year old. When this photo was taken, in 1926, the Veidt family was preparing to depart from Germany for America. Veidt had been invited by John Barrymore to co-star in the film *The Beloved Rogue*.

wrote his daily thoughts and impressions of the trip, for Viola to read years later. He started the diary in the family hotel room in Paris, and continued it each day of the trip on the liner *Mauretania*, and also while residing in Hollywood. Later, Viola did read the diary her father had left for her. Viola said that she cried at the sensitive and loving thoughts her father had written in the diary about herself, and her mother, Felicitas.

Upon arrival in Hollywood, Veidt was met at the train station by his patron, John Barrymore. Barrymore informed Veidt that reservations had been made for the Veidt family at an excellent hotel. Barrymore further informed Veidt that there was a gala premiere at the Carthay Circle Theater that evening and Veidt must accompany him. Veidt thanked Barrymore for the honor but stated that he would be unable to attend, as he had no evening clothes with him. Barrymore would accept no excuses, and stated that three suits of correct attire would be sent to Veidt's hotel room immediately.

Veidt did find a suitable coat and vest among the clothing provided, but all three of the trousers were much too short for his 6'3" frame. Unfortunately, there was no time now to look for other trousers, so Veidt donned the longest of the three pairs and departed for the premiere, hoping against hope that, somehow, he could slip into the theater as unobtrusively as possible, in the shadow of his famous new friend. He and Barrymore traveled to the theater in a large shiny black limousine. Upon stepping from the car, they were greeted by the emcee, who loudly announced them to the crowds outside the theater as "Mr. John Barrymore and the celebrated German actor, Conrad Veidt." Unfortunately, the emcee was unfamiliar with Conrad's last name and mispronounced it as VEET. At this time there was much applause, shouting, and whistling from the crowd of onlookers. Unnerved and somewhat frightened, and not waiting for Barrymore, Veidt hurried into the theater and sat down in one of the seats there. It wasn't until later that Veidt was able to explain to his host that in Europe whistling is considered to be the same as booing and catcalling. Veidt had thought that the crowds were booing him because of his laughably short trousers!

On the day of Conrad's arrival, Barrymore had been busy at the studio, working on an important scene which included over a thousand extras.



In 1926, Conrad was met at the Hollywood train station by John Barrymore, who is in costume for his role in the film *The Beloved Rogue*.



The swashbuckling drama *The Beloved Rogue* featured Veidt (left) as the crafty King Louis XI and John Barrymore (right) as the poet of the Paris beggars, Francois Villon.

Nevertheless, Barrymore reportedly requested a postponement of the filming. Still wearing full costume and make-up, he hurried to the station. On arrival there, and upon greeting Conrad, Barrymore exclaimed, "Gad, you're really tall!" His astonishment at Conrad's height was caused by the obvious discrepancy between Conrad's height and the height of the man Conrad was to portray. According to historical records, King Louis XI was nicknamed "The Spider King" because of his short, squat, and misshapen body and also because he was cruel and crafty by nature.

The next day a conference was held at the studio. Director Alan Crosland, the producer, the chief cameraman, the head of the costume department, and the two stars, Barrymore and Veidt, met to discuss the problem. Out of the many ideas that were offered, three of the suggestions were finally agreed upon. The cameraman suggested that Veidt be photographed from above, as much as possible, to make him appear shorter. The costume department head suggested that Veidt wear a long, trailing coat to minimize his height. Director Crosland suggested that Veidt play the role, when standing or walking, in a bent-over, crouching posture. For the sake of historical accuracy, Veidt agreed to

these suggestions. But after the filming began, Veidt discovered that standing and walking with his knees constantly bent was thoroughly uncomfortable, and at times quite painful. Still, he endured it for the sake of the characterization he was trying to convey.

When Veidt reported for work at the studio on the first day of shooting he learned more about his part in the scenario. Veidt was elated at the considerable and meaty role planned for him. Barrymore wanted Conrad for the important role of King Louis XI of France, while Barrymore played the swashbuckling role of Francois Villon, the poet of the beggars in 15th Century France, in the rousing United Artists production of *The Beloved Rogue*. The plot concerns the battle of wits between Villon and King Louis XI (Veidt). There was also a romance between Villon and a pretty young lass (winningly played by Marceline Day).

One film critic who watched much of the daily shooting of this film, from beginning to end, and later viewed the completed film when it was exhibited, gave Veidt a well-deserved accolade in his review. The critic stated that, in his opinion, Veidt's performance was so much better than Barrymore's acting that it was obvious to all who were on the set. At this point in the filming Barrymore privately complained to the producer and made an urgent request that the amount and desirable quality of Veidt's role as King Louis XI be considerably reduced. The producer and director acceded to their star's request and Veidt's role was drastically cut from an important role in the original scenario to a relatively insignificant part in the final edited print.

I understand that Barrymore went to a special preview of *The Beloved Rogue* and there watched the film from a private loge in the crowded theater. After only a brief period of observing himself acting in the star role, Barrymore reportedly shouted, "Oh, God, what a ham!" He then ran from the theater, went home, and drank himself into a drunken stupor.

After the film was over, the audience members were given printed cards on which to record their opinions of the film. When the opinion survey cards were studied and a consensus of opinion obtained, it was apparent that the majority of the audience members agreed with Barrymore's own low opinion of his over-acting. The United Artists studio executives were pleased to learn that the audience was highly impressed and pleased with Veidt's intense and gifted artistry as an actor and that they liked the film.

*The Beloved Rogue* was a commercial success, and Veidt's characterization was excellent as the crafty and superstitious French king.

After *The Beloved Rogue* was completed a special premiere was held in New York. Conrad was unable to go there for the opening night but Barrymore attended. Barrymore mailed a large envelope to Veidt, containing several newspaper clippings of the film. Each of the reviews gave favorable comments to Veidt's performance but only mediocre remarks about Barrymore's work. Barrymore enclosed a brief letter with the clippings, in which he stated: "I told you what a great actor you are. You are much greater than you know."

Not long after their arrival in Los Angeles, Veidt and his family moved into a lovely home located at 720 Foothill Road, Beverly Hills. The house was designed and built in the Spanish style and was very attractive and comfortable. It was quite spacious, which allowed the Veidts to have several guests stay over on frequent occasions.

There was iron grillwork on the windows; a large goldfish pond was at the rear of the house; and a large silver globe on a pedestal, to reflect the sun's rays, was on the lawn (all of which were popular additions to Hollywood homes in the 1920s).

Felicitas' bedroom was very feminine in style, done in a pink print pattern. There were several mirrors in the room, besides the one on the dressing table. There was a large bed on a raised platform, and over the



Conrad and Felicitas enjoy some reading and relaxing in the back yard of their home in Beverly Hills, circa 1928.



Conrad (at far right) is seen here enjoying some aquatic highjinks with friends. The identity of the two other men is not known to the author but the victim of the "dunking" is Conrad's wife, Felicita. The scene is the swimming pool on the Beverly Hills estate of one of Conrad's friends, circa 1929.

bed there was a colorful silk brocade canopy. The decor of Conrad's adjoining bedroom was in marked contrast to Felicita's room, being quite austere and masculine in appearance. Viola's bedroom, with a connecting room for her nanny, Dedda, was done in pink and beige colors, and there was a large puma skin as a rug near Viola's bed. The puma was very lifelike, with a stuffed head, fangs and all, and with shining staring eyes. This puma skin was a favorite of Viola's and she loved to take her daily nap lying on the rug, falling asleep while holding the puma's head with her little arms.

After completion of his contract with United Artists for *The Beloved Rogue*, Conrad was concerned about future film commitments in America. As it turned out, he need not have worried.

Soon after *The Beloved Rogue* was exhibited and became a commercial success, Veidt received offers from seven major Hollywood film producers to take part in their planned motion pictures. Faced with the knotty problem of which studio's offer to accept, Conrad finally chose Universal Pictures, a bustling and prolific film studio whose German-born founder and president, Carl Laemmle, had risked his savings by opening a small nickelodeon in Chicago in January, 1906. With the unexpectedly huge profits from this one early film outlet, Laemmle branched out, opening more nickelodeons and then forming his own film exchange, to handle

the distribution of motion pictures. With Laemmle's continued remarkable success, he finally took the next step, entering into the production side of motion pictures. Laemmle merged his IMP company in 1912 with several smaller film-making companies to establish Universal Pictures, which became one of the top half-dozen film studios in Hollywood's exciting history.

Veidt felt that Laemmle would be able to offer him first-rate roles in quality and prestige films. Also, Veidt and Laemmle got along very well together, communicating easily in German whenever their English failed them, and establishing a genuine and congenial rapport that was rare among producers and actors. Many film producers find actors to be exceedingly vain, difficult, and grasping; with interminable arguments about salaries, perquisites of a star, top-billing, etc. Actors, on the other hand, tend to think of their studio bosses as overly dictatorial, stingy, and uncaring about the actor's career.

Veidt and Laemmle were the exceptions, and Conrad took part in three films for Universal Pictures. It was only the advent of sound films that



This rare photo, taken in late 1926, shows Veidt greeting the head of Universal studios, Carl Laemmle. Laemmle was well aware of Veidt's skill as an actor and signed an exclusive contract with Veidt for a series of films. One of these motion pictures was the critically acclaimed film *The Man Who Laughs*, based on a well known Victor Hugo novel.

caused Veidt to request release from further American motion picture commitments and return to Germany. Carl Laemmle had planned to feature Veidt in at least four more films, namely *The Charlatan*; *Grease Paint*; *The Devil*; and an unnamed film based on another Victor Hugo novel. But Veidt felt his usefulness in Hollywood was over once sound films became popular and predominant.

Conrad's command of the English language was limited at this time. Although Conrad was studying English on a frequent basis with a tutor provided by the film studio and making good progress, the extent of his spoken English was still inadequate. In addition, Conrad's Germanic accent made his speech difficult to understand.

Although Conrad wasn't particularly a member of the Hollywood social set, he did receive many invitations to parties and social affairs and felt that he should attend some of them, if only for the sake of socializing with other members of the studios for which he worked. For this reason he and Felicitas did attend some of the parties and functions from time to time. One famous affair they attended was the grand opening of the fabled Hollywood hotel known as the Garden of Allah, on January 9, 1927. The opening ceremony was followed by a party that lasted for approximately eighteen hours. This affair was attended by many of Hollywood's famous stars, producers, directors, and other celebrities. The guest list included John Barrymore, Clara Bow, Sam Goldwyn, Gilbert Roland, Vilma Banky, Jack Dempsey, Marlene Dietrich, Francis X. Bushman, Cecil B. De Mille, Irving Thalberg, Adolph Zukor, Harold Lloyd, Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., Mary Pickford, Lil Dagover, and many more luminaries of the Hollywood firmament.

Even by the grandiose standards of Hollywood parties of the 1920s, this party was a spectacular affair. It was a costume party on a grand scale. The hostess, Alla Nazimova, came attired in the diaphanous costume she wore when performing Salome's erotic dance in a recent film. The food and drink at the party were equally distinguished: venison, caviar, champagne, vodka, various wines, and many other gourmet dishes.

Another social affair that the Veidts attended was the spectacular wedding on June 26, 1927, between two of Hollywood's brightest stars of the silent screen: Vilma Banky and Rod La Rocque. The scene of the wedding was the large church at Santa Monica and Bedford Drive in Beverly Hills. As both Miss Banky and Mr. La Rocque had been discovered for the screen by Sam Goldwyn, Goldwyn ordered his company's



publicity department to make all the wedding arrangements and his company paid all the expenses incurred. The wedding was handled like a major film premiere. An onlooker might think it was staged like a Cecil B. De Mille epic, with a cast of thousands. The huge guest list of six hundred persons read like a *Who's Who* of Hollywood. Among the famous stars who served as ushers were Ronald Colman and Harold Lloyd. In addition, thousands of hysterical fans crowded the nearby streets. The crowds had to be held back by police cordons. After the wedding a reception was held at the elegant Beverly Hills Hotel. Conrad and Felicitas attended the wedding ceremony and reception as invited guests. Among the other celebrity guests from the European colony in Hollywood were such

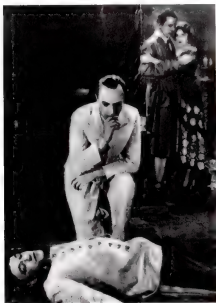


A trio of international cinema luminaries: Conrad Veidt (left); Emil Jannings (center) wearing a wig and period costume for his current film; and Ernst Lubitsch (right), a leading director of sophisticated romantic comedies for over twenty-five years. All three individuals began their careers acting on the stage in Germany. All three later achieved much fame and fortune in the cinema in other countries as well, particularly in the United States. All three were close friends for more than two decades until the cancer of Nazism brought a rift between them. It was Jannings' collaboration with the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s that caused Veidt and Lubitsch to break their friendship with him. This rare photograph, taken about 1928, showed Veidt visiting the studio set of his two friends, Jannings and Lubitsch.

luminaries as Ernst Lubitsch, Erich Pommer, Emil Jannings and Mrs. Jannings (Gussy Holl). The Veidts were tired but happy when returning home that evening after this glittering social event.

Conrad's first film for Universal was a superficial melodrama entitled *A Man's Past*. The film suffered from the uninspired direction of George Melford. Veidt's performance, however, infused considerable life and suspense into the film. He was cast as Dr. Paul Laroche, who had been sentenced by a French court to ten years on a French penal island for the crime of euthanasia. He later escaped from prison and made his way to Algiers. The screenplay was rather uneven and the critics panned the film, although they agreed that Veidt gave a fine characterization of the doctor/convict.

During the Veidt family's first year in America, Felicitas became very



Veidt (kneeling above) is shown in a still from the 1927 melodrama *A Man's Past*. Veidt played the role of Dr. Laroche, who is sentenced to imprisonment in a penal colony.

homesick for Germany. So she and two-year-old Viola, along with Viola's governess, went to Europe for a two-week visit. Conrad, being busy at work on a film in Hollywood, was unable to go with them.

In January, 1928, Conrad accepted an invitation from three old (and famous) friends to have dinner with them in an excellent Los Angeles restaurant. They were Max Reinhardt, Emil Jannings and Gussy Holl. They all had a marvelous time, dining and reminiscing about the old days in Germany and then discussing and comparing the new days in Hollywood.

In 1928, Veidt had another major cinema success in the film *The Man Who Laughs*. This film was based on the famous Victor Hugo story and gave Veidt the rare opportunity to be the pathetic victim instead of his usual role of villain. Conrad had a dual role, starring as both the main character, Gwynplaine, and also as Gwynplaine's father, a nobleman who has rebelled against the king in 17th Century England. The story begins with the order by King James II for the torture and execution of the rebellious Scottish nobleman, and for the hideous disfigurement of the nobleman's son and heir, Gwynplaine. A band of gypsies is hired to kidnap the child and to scar him for life by carving a ghastly permanent smile on his face. The pitiful child Gwynplaine is then heartlessly abandoned by gypsies in the midst of a raging snowstorm. As he stumbles along, looking for help, Gwynplaine comes across a baby girl held in the arms of her frozen and lifeless mother. Gwynplaine saves the little blind girl, Dea, from certain death. Gwynplaine and Dea are then taken in and adopted by Ursus, the kindly proprietor of a small traveling troupe of actors. Gwynplaine then suffers through his life, enduring the laughter and scorn of people as he is exhibited as a clown and a freak in the little traveling circus. He never knows happiness until years later when he falls in love with the now grown-up Dea, who reciprocates his love. As Dea is blind, she knows only Gwynplaine's fine character and soul, and is not repelled by his frightful and frozen grinning countenance. The role of Dea is appealingly played by Mary Philbin.

Soon after this, Gwynplaine learns that he is the long-lost heir to an English peerage. He is then offered marriage with the Duchess Josiana. Olga Baclanova gave a remarkable characterization in this role as the duchess who is both attracted to and repulsed by Gwynplaine's horrible countenance. Veidt had specifically requested that this talented Russian actress be assigned the role of the lascivious Duchess Josiana. Veidt had



In 1928, Veidt undertook the difficult role of Gwynplaine in the Universal film *The Man Who Laughs*. This was based on the famous Victor Hugo story of a man whose face had been mutilated when he was a child, so that he always bore a grotesque smile.

a way of putting people at their ease. This was especially noticeable on the film set where Veidt, by gently joking, encouraging, and teaching, could give confidence to young or nervous actors and actresses. Many years later, in an interview with a writer, Bacalanova said of Veidt: "Conrad Veidt was wonderful. I was crazy about him!"<sup>1</sup>

Gwynplaine decides to renounce his title and engagement to the duchess, however, so that he may be with Dea, the woman he loves. After an exciting escape from the pursuing forces of the Queen, Gwynplaine, Dea, and Ursus depart from England by ship to a new, happy life together.

Although basically a silent film, with the usual titles, this film also boasted a synchronized music track and sound effects. As this was the

1. *People Will Talk*, by John Kobal. Knopf, 1985.

period when "talkies" were just becoming popular, the producers felt that this added feature would help *The Man Who Laughs* compete with the fully-integrated sound films.

As part of this added sound track, the studio enhanced the film considerably with a charming melody entitled *When Love Comes Stealing Into My Heart*, composed by Erno Rapee. This lovely song was synchronized into the film frequently and was heard in those scenes in which Gwynplaine and Dea were together.

Paul Leni's direction was exceptionally well done and constitutes probably his best work in America. Veidt's portrayal of the tragic figure of Gwynplaine was remarkably expert and added much to the film's overall appeal and success.

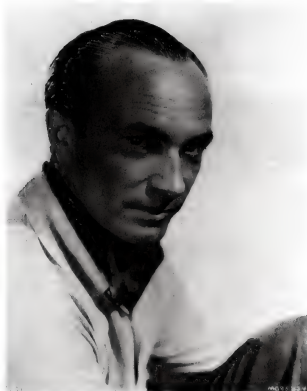
From Veidt's expert work in this difficult role and in many other roles which required the very utmost in the art of make-up and masks, Conrad has been compared favorably with America's own master of grotesque roles, Lon Chaney, Sr. Chaney's publicity title of "The Man of a Thousand Faces" would fit Conrad Veidt equally well. Both men were masters in assuming macabre roles for the screen. These roles entailed difficult make-up procedures and arduous acting. The roles were both physically and mentally very exhausting.

During the filming of *The Man Who Laughs*, Veidt was required to wear an extremely uncomfortable, specially-designed dental prosthetic device in his mouth. This device forced Veidt to maintain the grotesque grin on his face, hour after painful hour. Conrad sighed with relief when director Paul Leni finally indicated that Conrad's portion of the filming was completed and he could remove the dental device.

After completing his role as Gwynplaine in *The Man Who Laughs*, Veidt decided to refrain from portraying any more grotesque horror roles. He still gladly accepted roles as villains of various types, in which he often displayed an unusual blend of sinister menace and romantic appeal. But there would be no more roles such as Cesare in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* or Gwynplaine in *The Man Who Laughs*.

An interesting sidelight to Veidt's role in *The Man Who Laughs* concerns the evolution of the Batman comics. In 1989, the creator of *Batman*, Robert Kane, celebrated the 50th anniversary of his well-known caped crusader. Kane stated that sometime before he began the comic strip in 1939, he had seen the film *The Man Who Laughs* and was very much impressed by Veidt's performance as Gwynplaine, the man whose

grotesque smile was carved onto his face. From Veidt's mesmerizing performance Kane got the idea for one of the characters in his soon-to-be-published and widely syndicated strip. This is The Joker, a demented criminal who has the same pale white face and ghastly smile of the Victor Hugo character.



Veidt radiated a mixture of poise, charm, and sophistication on screen and off. Conrad also was well known for the elegant attire he wore on occasion, whether it was a posh formal black tie evening affair, or a casual daytime trip to the grocery store. In this publicity photo, circa 1940, Conrad is wearing a natty ascot, white jacket and gray trousers.

While working in Hollywood on his first visit there from 1926 to 1929, Conrad and his family resided in their comfortable Spanish-style home in Beverly Hills. In the backyard was a large fig tree. One of the pleasures Conrad and his two-year-old daughter shared was picking the fruit from this tree. With little Viola perched on his broad shoulders, and with much laughing and teasing, Conrad and Viola would pick the figs together and then bring them in to Felicitas for washing and serving. The whole family loved figs, and Conrad and Viola enjoyed the game of picking them, too.

Another happy activity shared by Veidt and his daughter was reading children's stories. Occasionally, on a sunny afternoon, Conrad and Felicitas and Viola would retire to their backyard. There Conrad would be comfortably ensconced on a chaise lounge, with Viola sitting nearby on a cushion on the concrete rim of the goldfish pond. Felicitas would be sitting in her armchair next to Conrad, with some knitting in her lap to occupy her hands, as she listened to Conrad's readings. Also on the scene would be the family fox terrier, Miko. Conrad would then read such favorite stories of Viola's as *Rumpelstiltskin*, *Hansel and Gretel*, the *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, the *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, and many others.

On these occasions, Conrad would present these stories in a manner far different from his sedate reading of stories to Viola at her bedtime. With greatly exaggerated facial expressions and gestures, and by changing his voice, Conrad would play all the roles in the story himself. To the accompaniment of gales of laughter and giggles from his appreciative audience, Conrad would over-act and "mug" outrageously. With fierce shouts, and eyes rolling, with energetic gesticulations, and with emotive fervor, Conrad would make the stories come alive, much to Viola's delight.

Conrad and Viola had to keep an alert eye out, during these story sessions, for their fox terrier. Miko would sometimes slip out of his collar and leash and head for the goldfish pond. Miko was fascinated by the fish swimming in the pond. While not interested in eating them, Miko knew instinctively how to catch the lazily-swimming fish. He would hang one paw in the water and then remain still, watching the fish intently. When one of the goldfish swam too near to his paw, Miko would quickly flip the fish out of the pond. It was merely a game to him. Viola would immediately return the fish, unhurt, to the water. She would also refasten Miko's collar and leash and secure him a safe distance away.

These story-telling readings enacted by her father were among Viola's fondest recollections of her first visit to America in the 1920s.



Conrad Veidt

„Hast Mitleid Du auch nicht  
Hast gewonnen“

„Du nicht befragst darüber  
Es ist nichts“

„Hast Mitleid Du auch nicht  
Hast verloren“

„Du nicht befragst darüber  
Es ist nichts“

„Freude gehen die Freuden und  
die Leiden“

„Geh an der Welt vorbei  
Es ist nichts“

Conrad Veidt

Verlag „Rosa“ Berlin SW 68.

41106/1

A Veidt picture postcard from the 1920s. Conrad is shown in a studio publicity pose, along with an excerpt from one of his favorite German poems. This poem, with a philosophical theme, may be translated freely as follows:

And if you have won a world,  
don't be happy with that.  
It is nothing.

And if you have lost a world,  
don't be disappointed with that.  
It is nothing.

The joy and suffering in the world  
will pass away.  
It is nothing.



Greta Garbo and Mauritz Stiller (who was Garbo's discoverer and mentor for her film career) were both extremely fond of Viola. At that early point in her career, Garbo wasn't the obsessive recluse she later became (uttering those famous words: "I want to be alone"). She and Stiller were frequent guests at the Veidt residence. When visiting the Veidt family, Stiller, who had enormous hands, would lift Viola up and let her sit on one of his hands. He would then playfully tease Viola, making funny faces for her, and tickling her feet, and permit Viola to pull his thick mustache. Stiller would then sing to Viola an old German song, "Einst war ich ein Knabe mit lockringen Haar" (I Once Was a Lad with Curly Hair). Conrad, who had a fine singing voice, would always join in on the chorus of this song. Sometimes Felicitas and "Aunt" Greta would also sing along. Viola loved to hear her "Uncle" Mauritz, her "Aunt" Greta, and her parents singing together in these impromptu quartets.



Conrad took this family photograph at his home in Beverly Hills in 1929. It shows Greta Garbo (at right) knitting a present for four-year-old Viola Veidt (at left) as Viola watches the progress. "Aunt" Greta was a close friend of the Veidt family and a frequently-invited guest at the Veidt home. The woman in the middle is Viola's governess.

Viola related to me recently an amusing incident from her childhood days in Beverly Hills. Viola, only about two or three years old, watched with much interest what she thought at the time was a funny game. Her father was playing cards and chatting and drinking with two of his good friends, Gary Cooper and Leslie Fenton. Gary Cooper's name is world-famous and needs no further introduction. Leslie Fenton is much less well-known. He was a British-born actor who was featured with Veidt in two of his films: *The Last Performance* and *FPI Doesn't Answer*. He later became a film director.

At any rate, on this occasion, Viola was watching, with wonder, as her father and her two "uncles" chatted and drank. From time to time, one of them, in turn, would go pick up a shovel, and walk across the street to a vacant lot. There he would dig up something and return to the others in the house. All this to Viola's growing wonderment, as she was not allowed to accompany the person with the shovel. After several trips were made, it became evident to Viola that each time a bottle of some amber liquid was being brought into the house and consumed by the three men. It wasn't until many years later that Viola understood that this was during the Prohibition Era and her father, not wanting to keep any liquor stored in his house, had buried a case of booze in the lot across the street.

Viola also related to me that during this same period she had many other "aunts" and "uncles," whose real names were Emil Jannings, John Barrymore, Mary Philbin, Carl Laemmle, Sr., Marlene Dietrich, etc. These were some of the leading directors, actors, actresses, and producers of those days, who were frequent houseguests or visitors of the Veidts and talked and played with Viola while visiting.

Another incident from that same Hollywood period of the 1920s that stands out in Viola's memory was the time that her "Uncle" Leslie Fenton had been at a party at the Veidt residence and had over-indulged. It seems that Fenton, apparently still suffering from a hangover, decided that a cool dip in the Veidt family swimming pool would be just the thing to clear his head. Before either Conrad or Felicitas could warn him that the pool had just been drained for cleaning, Fenton plunged in, striking his head on the tiled bottom. A doctor was immediately called and it was determined that Fenton had suffered a severe concussion and would have to remain at the Veidt residence for several days, as he could not be moved. Conrad and Felicitas and Viola took turns applying an ice bag to Fenton's head during his convalescence.

During Conrad's first stay in Hollywood, the Veidt family's domestic staff consisted of Jean, Hedwig, Rosie, and Dedda. Jean, the butler and bartender, was in his forties and was very tall and very thin. His wife Hedwig, the cook, was enormously obese but could create heavenly culinary dishes in her kitchen. Rosie, the maid, had arms and legs almost as thin as the broomstick she wielded. Dedda, the nanny, spent her time fondly looking after Viola. All members of the staff were quite pleasant and capable individuals, and Viola loved them dearly.

German was normally spoken in the Veidt household, both by the family and the domestic staff. Conrad felt, however, that he would improve his English more quickly if that language supplanted German at home. Therefore, not long after arriving in Hollywood, Conrad requested that everyone in the house use English as their primary language. There were, of course, occasions when Conrad, et al. lapsed into German because it was so familiar and they could express themselves more clearly. But all in all, the policy produced favorable results.

Viola recalls an incident from her childhood days in Hollywood involving an earthquake. Although earthquakes are not so unusual in the Los Angeles area, this particular seismic tremor was quite violent. It occurred about 3:30 in the morning and caused both Jean and Hedwig to fall out of their bed. Jean fell out of bed first, with Hedwig falling on top



Four famous European artistic performers in America. In 1927, Conrad was visited on the Universal Studios set by three friends, all outstanding performers in their special fields. To the left of Conrad in this photo is Bruno Walter, the eminent German opera and symphony conductor. To the right of Conrad is a distinguished father and son pair, Rudolf and Joseph Schildkraut. Rudolf was one of the greatest actors of the European stage in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Joseph has had a long and highly successful career in the American theater and in films.

of him immediately thereafter. Hedwig was so large and heavy that her falling on top of Jean broke one of his ribs. No one else in the house was injured, but Viola still remembers the commotion; the sight of several broken dishes on the kitchen floor and the calling of a doctor for Jean.

In the vast majority of his roles throughout his long cinema career, Veidt has been cast as the villain. However, his consummate skill as an actor often evoked the sympathy of the audience. It is trite to speak of many a screen villain as "The Man You Love to Hate," but Veidt perhaps personified this ambivalent feeling more than most other actors. In Veidt's own words: "Each new villainous role presented a challenge to me—could I make such an unreal character real? No human being is a villain just for villainy's sake. Something beyond his control relentlessly drives him on. I enjoy playing these parts, not because their violent evil attracts me, but because I want to show that even the worst evil-doer has some remnant of humanity in him! I have always tried to mingle a little sympathy with the audience's hate." At one point in 1928, the noted Broadway impresario Florenz Ziegfeld contacted Carl Laemmle about the possibility of featuring Veidt in a dramatic role in a stage production in New York. Laemmle and Ziegfeld were contemplating starring Veidt in a play on Broadway sometime in late 1928 or early 1929. But the parties involved were unable to come to an agreement and the role never materialized.



Proud father Conrad is seen here, with daughter Viola on his lap, while having a cup of tea with wife Felicita in 1926.

In 1929, two German film entrepreneurs, Arnold Höllriegel and Max Goldschmidt, came to Los Angeles to film an interesting documentary-style motion picture, which was entitled *Wir in Hollywood*, which attempted to give an understanding of the real Hollywood. There were brief appearances by Conrad Veidt and many other stars and producers of the period, such as Emil Jannings, Greta Garbo, Charlie Chaplin, Janet Gaynor, Dolores Del Rio, Ernst Lubitsch, F.W. Murnau, Michael Kertecz, Colleen Moore, Carl Laemmle, Sr., etc. Among the brief scenes there was a cameo shot of Conrad Veidt playing a game of ping pong; Emil Jannings having breakfast at his palatial home; Carl Laemmle at his large estate, complete with his own private park, his own beach, and showing many of his varieties of cacti and other exotic plants on his estate; Greta Garbo as a housewife in her home; and so on. The film also took the audience on a tour of the major film studios, and tried to show the stars in the act of just being themselves. As trite as it may sound, this photoplay/documentary did an excellent job of giving us a brief glimpse of the Hollywood of that era.

Speaking of Emil Jannings' home, Veidt often would visit Janning's huge mansion on Hollywood Boulevard. The estate consisted of an ornate and spacious house, a large garden, and the usual (for Hollywood) tennis court and swimming pool. The house proper had a very large living room, and was decorated and furnished in a very unusual style.

Conrad used to delight in telling how Jannings kept a large chicken coop in his garden, with many roosters and hens. Jannings had a habit of giving names to these chickens, naming them after his friends in the movie colony. Jannings named one hen after Greta Garbo and another after Marlene Dietrich. One feisty rooster was named after director Ernst Lubitsch. Conrad would always bring some type of food tidbit for *his* rooster namesake whenever he visited the Jannings estate.

Incidentally, while Conrad was under contract to Universal Studios, his salary was \$2,000 per week, or \$104,000 per annum. But in those bygone 1920s days of low income taxes and low prices, this amount of money provided a much higher standard of living than it would today.

Conrad's last American silent film, released in 1929, was entitled, somewhat appropriately, *The Last Performance*. This Universal film, directed by Paul Fejos, was an entertaining little romantic melodrama, with Veidt cast in the role of Erik the Great, a stage magician. The plot concerns the tragedy that results when the passions of love, jealousy, and

hate inflame the four members of a magician's troupe. The head of the troupe, Erik, is an older man in love with a much younger woman, his stage assistant Julie (Mary Philbin). Julie is in love with one of Erik's other assistants, Mark (Fred Mackaye), who reciprocates Julie's love. The fourth member of the troupe, Buffo (Leslie Fenton) is jealous of Mark and Erik and desires Julie for himself. In a dramatic scene, Buffo exposes the secret romance of Julie and Mark to Erik.

Erik, livid with jealousy and rage, then decides to utilize an old magic trick, with swords and a trunk, on stage to eliminate his two rivals for Julie's hand. In the course of the performance with swords, Buffo is killed and Mark is arrested for the murder. During the ensuing court trial, Julie pleads with Erik to help save Mark from the electric chair. Erik then confesses to the murder and shows the judge and jury how he used a hidden dagger to murder Buffo. Erik then commits suicide by plunging the dagger into his heart.



7 Veidt gave a first-rate portrayal of the magician, Erik the Great, in the 1928 Universal (romantic melodrama of love, passion, and jealousy entitled *The Last Performance*.

Director Fejos used the excellent screenplay and the fine cast with great effect. Hal Mohr's innovative camerawork was also an important factor in the film's favorable reviews. Mary Philbin played the part of the pretty stage assistant in an ingratiating manner.

The new, revolutionary sound films were first introduced during Veidt's first visit to Hollywood. There was considerable resistance against the "talkies" in the 1920s. Many of the old-time producers, directors, and actors felt that the introduction of sound would be no improvement whatsoever to the cinema. They believed that silence and the art of pantomime were fundamental and inherent in films. One of the most popular movie stars of that silent era, Mary Pickford, declared that "adding sound to movies would be like putting lipstick on the statue of Venus de Milo!"



This photo was taken in September, 1926, just before the Veidt family's departure from Germany to America. Felicitas is asking her husband: "Connie, do you think I can wear this coat in Hollywood?"

Charlie Chaplin was another great star of the silent era who resisted the transition to sound films. Chaplin continued to create memorable silent motion pictures well into the 1930s (e.g., *City Lights* [1931] and *Modern Times* [1936]). But even Chaplin eventually acceded to the wave of the future—sound motion pictures.

Another famous filmmaker who resisted the coming of sound in motion pictures, and who clung to the silent film as the "only correct art form for films," was the French master director, René Clair. Clair, in 1928, opined that "sound will be the death of films." Needless to say, Clair later changed his mind on this subject and began to use sound in his films with great effect.

One perceptive film critic wrote this about Veidt in 1927: "The exceptionally fine pantomime of this German screen actor is one of the most formidable arguments against talking pictures that I know of!"



Veidt was already famous in Europe as a stage and screen actor when this studio publicity photo was taken in 1923.



In spite of the objections of the silent film advocates, it was quite evident that soon silent movies would be a thing of the past. Sound films spread like wildfire and it soon was obvious that an era had ended and that the film moguls of the time would have to convert to the new sound systems or else go out of the cinema business. Competition in the cinema industry was extremely intense at this time.

In 1926, Warner Brothers introduced the first photoplay with a synchronized musical score, *Don Juan*. When Warner Brothers took the next step, in late 1927, and produced and released the first motion picture with a spoken dialogue, the first major talkie, *The Jazz Singer*, the audiences and critics were highly enthusiastic. This was generally recognized as the death knell for silent pictures and Veidt understood this as well as anyone.

The addition of sound to motion pictures increased immeasurably the cinema's ability to sway the emotions of the viewers. Although at first Conrad was admittedly somewhat doubtful about sound films, it wasn't long before he realized sound would be a tremendous improvement to the cinema. He recognized the fact that with the characters speaking many pages of dialogue, directors and screenwriters could now create films which expressed complicated ideas and displayed a much wider range of emotions than heretofore in the silent medium.



Conrad is shown here in the study of his home in Beverly Hills in 1927. He has just agreed to star in the Universal melodrama *A Man's Past*.

As for Veidt himself, his mellifluous voice was one of his greatest assets. The disadvantage, of course, was his difficulty with English pronunciation and his strong German accent. While Conrad felt his usefulness in Hollywood was at an end, he believed this was an opportunity to further his career. By returning to Germany, he could take advantage of the transition there to sound films and thereby obtain better film roles in the German language films.

Although Conrad and his family had enjoyed their stay in Hollywood, and although many of his American friends and associates from the film industry tried to persuade Conrad to stay in America, his mind was made up. Even his great good friend and supporter, Carl Laemmle, Sr., the head of Universal Studios, tried to change Conrad's mind about leaving, promising him better roles.

Among the better roles Veidt was being considered for by Universal was the lead as the vampiric Count Dracula in the classic horror film, *Dracula*. But because of several delays Universal didn't begin production on this film until October, 1930. By that time Veidt had left the U.S. and had returned to Germany. Universal then chose Bela Lugosi for what was to become an unforgettable role. Without detracting from Lugosi's superb portrayal of Dracula, one can also imagine what a marvelous delineation of this satanically malevolent role Veidt could have performed. But as things turned out, Laemmle was unable to persuade Veidt to remain in America and the opportunity was lost.

Conrad, in later years, would sometimes relate an anecdote of how he took his daughter, Viola, to her first movie. It was when Conrad and his family were living in Los Angeles in 1928. One day he took Viola, then three years old, to see a silent cowboy film. It was the usual type of western film, with much exciting action, frequent gunfights, fistfights, and stirring chases. The actors over-acted by wearing fierce facial expressions and using excessive hand and arm gestures.

After a little while, Viola tugged on her father's arm and said, "Tell me, Papa, why do they speak so softly? I can't hear what they are saying." Conrad gave Viola a brief explanation of why there was no spoken dialogue but it was difficult for a very young child to grasp the concept of silent films. It obviously didn't make sense to Viola that there could be so much action accompanied by such fierce expressions, with no words being heard.

# 13

## The Return to Germany

**T**HUS IT WAS THAT on February 10, 1929, the Veidt family set sail for Europe. Felicitas and Viola, who was about four years old at this time, were of two minds about their departure. They wished to stay on in Hollywood but they also looked forward to seeing relatives and old friends again in Germany. Naturally, Conrad was not the only one leaving Hollywood because of the transition to sound films. Emil Jannings, Pola Negri, and several other members of the foreign film colony in Hollywood also returned to Europe with the advent of the sound films.

Another reason for Veidt's abrupt departure was that the Hollywood atmosphere seemed artistically stifling to him. Aside from the lack of really good cinema roles being offered to him, he also was bored with the social quality and cultural level of Hollywood. It seemed to Conrad that all the residents of the movie colony could talk about was: 1. their own movies; 2. their swimming pools, tennis courts, expensive automobiles, and sumptuous mansions; 3. the usual type of Hollywood star gossip (i.e., who was now dating whom, who was divorcing whom, who was drinking too much, etc.). This materialistic and vulgar manifestation of Hollywood was distasteful to Conrad. Conrad also disliked the hypocrisy and phoniness of many of Hollywood's leading producers, directors, and actors. Hollywood's elite seemed to live by the motto "Always be sincere, even if you don't mean it!"

Soon after he and his family returned to Germany, Veidt appeared in person at a large and luxurious theater in the fashionable section of Berlin, the Universum Theater on Kurfürstendamm, on March 1, 1929, to attend the premiere of his very successful American-made film *Der Mann der Lacht* (The Man Who Laughs). It was evident that Veidt had given an incomparable performance as the pitiful Gwynplaine, as the film was exceedingly well received in Germany, as it had been in the United States.

The critics' reviews were highly favorable and the day was a personal triumph for Veidt. He enjoyed the glamour and excitement of the premiere, as did his wife Felicitas, and he also enjoyed signing autographs for his many fans and speaking with prominent persons from the German and International film industry, and from other walks of life, and with members of the audience. All in all, it was a memorable day for Conrad.

Also in March, 1929, Conrad was the guest of honor at a large "welcome back" party thrown for him by an old friend. The lengthy party list included the names of many well-known personages of the day. Predictably, a goodly number of these were from the world of the cinema and stage. But there were other notables too, from government, business, sports, as well as other walks of life. One of these guests was Veidt's new friend, Max Schmeling, whom he had met on the ship on the voyage from the United States to Europe. Schmeling was the heavyweight boxing champion of Germany at that time, and would soon become the heavyweight boxing champion of the world, in June, 1930.



Conrad and a very young Viola spending a pleasant moment together at home, just before Viola's bedtime.

Not very long after this party, Veidt was notified by his agent that a local representative of an American film company wished to speak with him. On talking with this studio representative, Conrad learned that a brief portion of the dialogue of his most recent American film had not come out technically perfect. Veidt was respectfully requested to provide a replay of that necessary bit of dialogue. With Veidt's consent, arrangements were made for a trans-Atlantic telephone call, of some six thousand miles' distance, from Berlin to Hollywood. In this call, Conrad spoke the needed sentences from the script into the phone and technicians in Hollywood recorded the dialogue for insertion into the sound track of the film in question, with very satisfactory results.

It should perhaps be emphasized that although Veidt was most appreciative of the opportunity to come to Hollywood and to take part in American films, and to observe the American motion picture methods and techniques, he was not really happy or artistically satisfied with the caliber of the roles he received in the United States. He felt that he should get much better parts in films and that the quality of several of the motion picture roles and scripts offered to him was mediocre at best. This was another reason why he elected to return to Europe in 1929, in addition to the primary reason of his limited ability with English and the advent of the "talkies." Veidt sincerely felt that he wasn't being utilized to the utmost by the American producers and casting directors.

I'm sure that this feeling of getting poor roles was certainly not confined to Veidt alone. Perhaps most film stars are deeply convinced that they should be offered much better film roles and that the studio moguls care nothing about their actors' careers and are interested only in reaping a large and quick financial bonanza from their actors under contract. Many actors and actresses have refused to honor their film contracts at times because they sincerely believed that they deserved much better roles and that the parts offered to them were not "right" for them. In all fairness to the film studio heads and their casting directors, the records are replete with instances in which a famous actor turned down an offered role, thinking it was bad for his career, and then watched with considerable chagrin as the part was next offered to a lesser-known (or completely unknown) actor, who later received much fame and fortune from the part that was spurned by the established actor.

Perhaps the classic example of an actor's poor judgment in assessing an offered film role was the error made by Veidt's good friend, Gary Cooper,

in the late 1930s. When told that Clark Gable had accepted the role of Rhett Butler in the film *Gone With The Wind* (after Cooper himself had turned down an offer for that role), Cooper reportedly made the following statement: "*Gone With the Wind* is going to be the biggest flop in Hollywood history. I'm just glad that it will be Clark Gable who's falling flat on his face and not Gary Cooper!"

After returning to Germany, Veidt took part in several German sound films. Fortunately, Veidt did not share the tragedy of some actors who were unable to make the transition successfully from the silent to sound films. Some actors' voices were too high and were not accepted by the motion picture audiences, and their film careers were ended abruptly and prematurely; some even at the peak of their film career in silent films (John Gilbert is a prime example of this in America). Veidt's voice had a pleasant ring to it and he could convey with his voice the character he was portraying. For example, in some of his villainous roles his voice gave off an oiliness or inflection that added to the dislike felt by the audiences for the person he was portraying. Conrad's voice was one of his most valuable cinema assets.



A rare still photo from an early (and unidentified) German silent film depicts Conrad (at right) sparring with an unidentified actor.

Upon the Veidt family's return to Germany in 1929, they moved into a nice, large apartment in Berlin. The dining room had a lovely stained glass window, which produced a grand rainbow effect on the rug when the sun shone through the variegated colored glass. For Viola, four years old, this was great fun and a favorite spot for her to play was on the rug with her own little rainbow.

Conrad was busy with work on a new film and when he returned home each evening he and Viola would engage in their favorite game. Pretending not to see Viola in the doorway area, Conrad would shout, "Where is my Fuchsi?" (This was his pet affectionate name for Viola, meaning "Little Fox" in German). He would then open his coat (Berlin winters are quite cold and Conrad's coat was a heavy one, lined with fur) and then Viola would climb onto his feet, holding onto her father's legs as he walked. Conrad would then close his coat and walk into the living room, with Viola being carried backwards on his feet. All the while, Conrad would be calling out, in a loud voice, "Where is my Fuchsi?" This was soon followed by much giggling, laughing, hugs and kisses between father and daughter. This little game, played daily, was a happy time for both of them.

To quote Veidt again, on the subject of the importance to him of speaking and having sound in the films: "Here I must glide onto the stage and give through costume, expression, movement, mask, and speech, a new life, my life! Through *speech*! This was completely lacking in silent films, and yet it means so much to me! I have many times made use of the strongest artistic emotions, and felt them myself, only through the spoken word! I shall have to hear my voice resounding, with its sound, its workings, and its echo in public. There is so much that one can do through the voice, in the way of expression, and it is also possible, in reciting poetry and prose, to lend life to the verses and prose lines of a writer. And all that only through the voice!"

In addition to a busy film schedule, Conrad also participated in a remarkable theatrical event not long after his return to Germany. On March 28, 1929, a unique stage play took place at the Staats-Theater in Berlin. This was a special one-time performance of the play *Der Marquis von Keith*. This five-act play was written by Frank Wedekind and was directed by Leopold Jessner. The purpose of the gala affair was two-fold: first, as a memorial tribute to Albert Steinrück, a noted actor who had died recently and, second, as a benefit for his widow and children.

All the roles in the play were performed by stars of the German theater. Among these I might mention just a few: Werner Krauss, Heinrich George, Conrad Veidt, Mady Christians, Elizabeth Bergner, Alexander Granach, Fritz Kortner, Paul Wegener, Kurt Gerron, Hans Albers, Marlene Dietrich, Lucie Mannheim, and Asta Nielsen.

The play was scheduled to begin late in the evening, at 11 p.m., so that the actors and other stage personnel would be finished with their regular daytime duties. Veidt was cast in the role of Zamrjaki, a composer. Heinrich George had the title role of the Marquis of Keith. The honorary committee that sponsored this stellar attraction included Professor Albert Einstein, Professor Max Reinhardt, Paul Löbe, the president of the Reichstag, as well as many of Germany's leading citizens. The price of the seats ranged from 10 marks in the gallery to 60 marks for the best seats. The theater was filled to capacity and the play was a huge success, providing a touching and sincere tribute to a fine actor.

One of Veidt's films that is of interest was the first sound film that he made upon his return to Germany in 1929. The first "talkie" for Veidt was entitled *Bride 68* or *Das Land ohne Frauen*, released by Tobis films,



Conrad (left) is unrecognizable wearing this heavily padded clown suit and outlandish wig. Conrad also has some cotton stuffing in his cheeks. This photograph was taken at a masquerade party, circa 1929. Also at the party was actress Lil Dagover (right), who gave a fine impersonation of Charlie Chaplin's "Little Tramp" character.



and directed by Carmine Gallone. Also featured in the film were Grete Berger and Clifford McLaglen, with Veidt in the role of Dick Ashton. The setting of this adventure story was Australia in the 1800s. The German title, *Das Land ohne Frauen* (The Land Without Women), gives some indication of the story line. The sound track was partly in English and partly in German.

The screenplay of this film was loosely based on a true story. In about 1880, four hundred and thirteen women were transported from England on a long and rigorous sea voyage to Australia, where they would become the wives of men who had settled there. The plot concerned a love triangle that developed on the women's arrival in Australia, involving Bride #68 (well played by Elga Brink) and two men who both wanted her. Veidt played one member of this triangle, the telegrapher, Dick Ashton.

This film was not one of Veidt's best films but it was his introduction to sound motion pictures. This action melodrama is generally credited with being Germany's first feature length sound film.



Veidt is seen here with co-star Karin Evans in a scene from the absorbing 1930 German film *Die Letzte Kompagnie* (The Last Company). Veidt gave an impeccable performance as Captain Burk, who leads his small group of Prussian soliders in one of the battles of the Napoleonic wars.

Actually, one film critic thought rather highly of this early German sound film, and of Veidt's acting. This was Ernst Jaeger, an important film critic, and later the editor of the influential Berlin daily, the *Film-Kurier* (from 1924 to 1938). Jaeger wrote in his review of the film: "This is an epoch-making event. Veidt acts in two scenes in which he stands at the threshold of the new art. This is a new art form; a new art expression, never experienced before at such close range!"

Incidentally, I met Jaeger many years later (1958) in Hollywood. He was working with Richard Oswald, the distinguished German film director and producer, acting as his personal secretary and administrative assistant. I found Jaeger to be a most charming and knowledgeable person, who helped me with my Veidt research.

Parenthetically, while attending the film premiere of *Das Land ohne Frauen* in Berlin, Conrad was notified of the death of his long-time friend and director, Paul Leni. Leni had suddenly died the previous day, September 2, 1929, in Hollywood, from blood poisoning. Conrad was greatly saddened at this news because he had worked with Paul Leni on five films and they had been good friends in Germany and in America. Leni and Veidt, and their wives, had often visited each other's homes. Leni and Veidt had known each other professionally since 1912 when Leni had been a stage designer for Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater and Veidt had been a novice actor at the same theater in Berlin.

Paul Leni had been, at various times, the art director, the assistant director, and the head director of these successful films which featured or starred Veidt: *Das Rätsel von Bangalor*; *Prince Cuckoo*; *Patience*; *Waxworks*; and *The Man Who Laughs*. Leni's untimely death at the age of forty-four was especially sad because many film critics felt Leni had an outstanding talent for set design and film direction and they had predicted a bright future for him in Hollywood.

That first year back in Germany was not all work for the Veidt family. Conrad and Felicitas and Viola took a few days of vacation, in between commitments to Conrad's busy film schedule. They rented a villa in Carlsbad, a famous spa in Czechoslovakia. In the daytime they would go sightseeing around the nearby areas, and in the evening Conrad and Felicitas would sit out on the terrace with some friends, enjoying the excellent food and drink and conversation.

One of the best sound films that Veidt participated in, his second talkie, was the 1930 UFA release *Die Letzte Kompagnie* (The Last Company),

in which he portrayed Captain Burk. Kurt Bernhardt was the director of this absorbing motion picture. Bernhardt later came to America and directed many fine films. Veidt's co-stars in this excellent motion picture were Karin Evans and Alexander Granach.

The film concerns a valiant rear-guard action of a small Prussian Army unit in the Napoleonic Wars. This unit of only thirteen men is ordered to hold out as long as possible against the French Army pursuing them, so that the main body of the Prussian Army can escape over the river to safety. The captain and his twelve soldiers are all killed in the battle. The victorious French army, recognizing the valor displayed by the small Prussian unit, then honors the dead by saluting them.

This photoplay earned the praise of all who saw it for its story, the fine performances of its cast, and for its direction. Although a first-class film, *Die Letzte Kompanie* was typical of the stream of films coming from German studios during this period which glorified the Prussian spirit of militarism, nationalism, and Junker authoritarianism.



One of Conrad's most attractive assets—his piercing eyes, could hypnotize most women.



Conrad and friend Jack Trevor (at left) relax and chat after a game of badminton. Trevor was a fellow actor who appeared with Conrad in the 1925 film *Liebe macht blind*.



Conrad, Viola, and Pelicita are seen here relaxing at the beach by the Baltic Sea in 1931.

After the primary German language version of this film was completed, UFA prepared a secondary English language version for the British and American movie markets. For this purpose Conrad went through the script again. He "silently" mouthed the English words, while an English actor who had been brought to Berlin specially for this version, spoke the synchronized words for the recorded sound track. Conrad understood the need for this process but felt it was asking too much of the actors. As Conrad described the problem: "It is too difficult, after the primary actor has gotten the feeling for a role, for someone else to try to get that *same* feeling into that *someone else's* voice!"

At this very same time, on the next sound stage, Bernhardt's friend, the noted director Josef von Sternberg, was directing one of UFA's famous classics *The Blue Angel*, starring Marlene Dietrich and Emil Jannings. Both films, Bernhardt's *The Last Company* and von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel*, were highly successful, commercially and critically, and both are still shown in revival theaters and film art societies in Europe.

Also in 1930, Conrad was offered and accepted a cameo role in an unusual type of film—a musical. Unusual, that is, for Veidt, as he vastly preferred acting in films and stage plays that were highly dramatic in content. He rarely participated in musicals or comedies. Conrad played himself in this motion picture entitled *Die Grosse Sehnsucht* (The Great Yearning). The story locale was a film studio and Veidt's co-stars were Camilla Horn, Lil Dagover, and Theodor Loos. The plot concerned the ambitions and hopes of young actors and actresses trying to get "their big chance" for stardom on the movie screen.

Veidt had a beautiful speaking voice, with a very sensuous quality to it. The fact was immediately apparent to all audiences of these, his first sound films. Veidt's tremendous talents were often wasted when he was assigned roles in mediocre films with ordinary plots. But Veidt managed to infuse excitement and fascination for the audiences into even the dullest motion picture screenplays. Veidt's smooth acting style was the delight of his army of fans, and the good-natured envy of his peers in the acting world.

# 14

## Some Information About Veidt Himself

LET'S DIGRESS A BIT from Conrad's film-making work to a discussion of his personal likes and dislikes. Conrad had many forms of sport and recreation that gave him much pleasure and exercise. One was horseback riding. Others were swimming, sunbathing, and walking along the beach. Conrad liked boating (rowboats and sailboats). Badminton and ping-pong were two more of his favorite sports. In the 1920s in Hollywood, Conrad and Felicitas often would play ping-pong "doubles" and "singles" games with Greta Garbo and Mauritz Stiller and Emil Jannings and his wife Gussy. Conrad enjoyed trying his skill at billiards on the table at the Jannings' residence. Card games of various types frequently were played at the Veidt, Jannings, Garbo, and Gary Cooper residences in Hollywood when those friends would get together.

Golf was probably Conrad's favorite sport of all. I have been told that Conrad was an excellent golfer, although he preferred to tell people he played more for the exercise and the relaxation than because of any skill or dedication to the sport itself. Conrad really did like the game and would go golfing whenever he could get away from the studios and could find a congenial golf partner.

Conrad's liking for picnics and his love of automobiles were frequently combined when he and Lily would prepare a large basket of delicious food and then go for a long drive in the countryside, stopping wherever they found a nice spot that appealed to them.

Two pastimes of a more sedentary nature that Conrad was fond of were reading and listening to music, especially classical music. Conrad's reading tastes encompassed works of fiction and non-fiction. Four of his favorite subjects were philosophy, astronomy, occultism, and psychology.

Among Conrad's favorite musical compositions were works by Chopin, Beethoven, Mozart, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, and Grieg. While Conrad and Lily

were residing in the Los Angeles area in the early 1940s, one of their favorite spots was the Hollywood Bowl. This huge amphitheater often held outdoor concerts featuring classical music played by fine orchestras. On those concert evenings, Conrad and Lily would drive to the Hollywood Bowl and together they would gain much pleasure from the beautiful music and surroundings. As Conrad expressed it: "I think the Hollywood



Conrad Veidt

Veidt, "Rosa" Berlin SW 22

A common practice of German film studios in the 1920s was the use of autographed publicity photos of their actors and actresses on  $3\frac{1}{2}'' \times 5\frac{1}{2}''$  postcards. On the reverse of the photo was space for a written message, address and stamp. The above postcard, autographed by Veidt in 1925, is typical of this publicity practice.



Conrad was very fond of dogs and cats and there usually was one or the other in the Veidt household.

Bowl is the most wonderful thing in all of California. Just think, all those people out under the stars, listening to music! So quiet, so one! I like to think them a symbol that one day there may be that same oneness for all mankind!"

There was one musical program at the Hollywood Bowl that Conrad



recalled with particular pleasure. That was the evening the orchestra performed Grieg's *Piano Concerto in A Minor* (a favorite of Conrad's) along with several Chopin piano pieces. Both Conrad and Lily enjoyed the concert immensely.

In the latter part of Conrad's life, while he was living in England and America, he developed an interest in, and a certain skill with, gardening. Conrad found gardening to be a useful and relaxing means of occupying some of his leisure time.

Another thing that Conrad liked was a thunderstorm. He liked the feeling of being warm and dry and cozy inside his home, together with his family, while outside Nature put on a dramatic spectacle. Inside the house, Conrad, Felicitas, and Viola would sit near a cheery fire blazing in the fireplace, while talking and roasting chestnuts or eating some other treat, and playing parlor games.

Speaking of food, one of Conrad's gastronomical pleasures and weaknesses was a fondness for pastries and desserts of all kinds, especially chocolate cake.

Conrad (and his daughter, Viola) had a strong liking for animals, particularly dogs and cats. There was usually a cat or dog in the Veidt home. Among the many beloved pet members of the Veidt household over the years were the following: Miko, a smooth-haired fox terrier;



The Veidt family in a close and happy moment at the Bansin beach in 1930.

Tommy, a wire-haired fox terrier; Mackie, a Sealyham terrier; and Peter, a large black and white cat. Felicitas didn't care for pets and tolerated them grudgingly. Conrad liked having his pet dog nearby, so that when he would stretch out on the living room couch to read one of his film scripts, the family dog was usually curled up on the couch also.

Conrad immensely enjoyed driving a fine motor car at high speeds when the highway was clear and safe. Conrad said that the driving usually helped him to relax after a long, difficult day of rehearsals. During his lifetime he owned many automobiles and most of them were motorcars of quality and superior performance, including a sporty 1935 Buick convertible with a sleek custom body by a British bodymaker.

As an aficionado of motor cars, Conrad liked to meet with his friends and discuss motor cars. One such close friend in the 1920s, both in Berlin and Hollywood, who shared Conrad's passion for powerful and high quality motor cars was Emil Jannings. Jannings possessed an elegant Mercedes-Benz town car and a sporty 1927 Lincoln convertible. In Hollywood, Veidt and Jannings would get together, either at Jannings' home or Veidt's home, and "talk cars" the whole afternoon. While thus occupied, their spouses, Felicitas Veidt and Gussy Jannings, would enjoy some tea and conversation in the living room. The fact that these two fashionably dressed women, talking animatedly about a dozen topics, happened to be the present and former wives of Herr Veidt, respectively, did not seem to present any embarrassing problems. Gussy was happy now with Emil and Felicitas was content with Conrad. The foursome were quite good friends and visited together often.

Meanwhile, out in the garage, their husbands happily puttered about their cars, tinkering under the hood and polishing the already gleaming chrome work. Conrad's powerful, luxurious Packard sedan was his pride and joy.

Conrad also loved a good joke or a funny story and he would laugh uproariously when savoring the humor of some witty remarks he had just heard. Conrad was adept at telling funny stories himself and he was often "the life of the party" at the social get-togethers he attended.

Conrad had an earthy sense of humor and enjoyed exchanging amusing stories that sometimes had erotic or scatological themes with his friends. Within his family and among his close friends, Conrad would sometimes jokingly use a popular German euphemistic phrase instead of the word "toilet." This phrase originated in the old days of the German Empire, and is heard more often in Berlin than in the other cities and towns of



Although not a great equestrian, Conrad was a competent horseman and he enjoyed an occasional canter. Here he is seen, with an unidentified friend, at the seashore about 1930.

Germany. Conrad would say, "Ich gehe wo der Kaiser zu Fuss geht" ("I am going where the emperor betakes himself on foot!"). This comical expression would invariably bring a giggle from Viola but only a thin smile from Felicitas, who had heard it many times before.

Conrad loved to be with his wife and daughter as much as possible. He and his family would take little trips to sightsee in the towns and villages they were in when he was on location for a film. Whenever Conrad could get away from his theatrical commitments he would take his family for a visit to some spa, such as the summer resorts of Bansin and Travemuende on the Baltic Sea. Conrad liked the seashore and he and Felicitas and little Viola enjoyed walking along the beach. The Baltic Sea area is beautiful in its own way, even though the sea and sky there are often gray and the water is usually choppy and rough. After enjoying the beach and water in the hot afternoon, Conrad and his family would often attend the band concert given on the bandstand near their hotel in Travemuende, in the evening when it was cool. Other resort areas that the Veidts visited were Garmisch (noted for winter sports and its Alpine beauty) and Lainz, where Conrad would enjoy the golfing at the International Country Club.

Finally, there was one more thing that Conrad liked, and wished for, but which he never attained. But let Conrad describe it, in his own words: "My ideal is to have a farm. Not too big—a few cows, some horses, perhaps some pigs, a dozen or so chickens, with things growing and with barnyard sounds. That is what I would like to have someday."

Conrad was never able to acquire a farm. Probably, the frequent travel requirements of an actor's career prevented him from reaching his goal of operating a small farm.

Viola recently related to me a pleasant memory she has of her father helping her with some farm animals. Viola recalled that in the summer of 1937 she and her mother were living in Switzerland. Felicitas had rented a large house in the country outside of Geneva. The estate consisted of two acres of land, and included a pond on the property. Viola had begged her mother for some chickens and ducks, promising to take care of them



Viola Veidt told the author that this photograph of her parents is one of her favorites. It shows Conrad and Felicitas in a candid and relaxed moment outside their hotel in Travemuende, Germany, on the Baltic sea coast. The Veidt family was on vacation at the time and Conrad and Felicitas are seen here throwing bread crumbs to the seagulls. The photograph has a certain atmospheric quality, almost as though it is a scene from one of Conrad's films, instead of a brief moment in his private life in 1930.



Taking a respite from the day's often hectic pace, Conrad spends a quiet interval with a good book. Conrad was an avid reader and enjoyed both fiction and non-fiction works.

herself. When her mother agreed reluctantly, a chicken compound was built and the poultry was purchased. On arrival at the estate, the ducks immediately took possession of the pond. One of the benefits derived from the newly-acquired chicken population was fresh eggs for the Veidt family breakfasts.

It wasn't long after this that Conrad arrived in Geneva on business for a few days. Having some free time between meetings, Conrad came out to Felicitas' new summer home to visit with Viola. Viola was delighted to see her father and excitedly showed him around their new estate, especially the duck pond and the chicken compound.

Felicitas had arranged with a neighboring farmer to sell her two more chickens. Viola asked her father if he would accompany her to the neighbor's farm and Conrad readily agreed. They immediately set out, on foot, as it was only about half a mile. The farmer accepted the money from Conrad and handed Conrad and Viola one chicken each. Viola states that her father had never held a live chicken before. Viola's chicken was calm and gentle and she was able to carry the bird easily. Conrad's chicken, however, was belligerent, struggling, squawking, and pecking continuously, and the great actor was having a difficult time holding on to the bird. In due time they arrived at the Veidt home and deposited the birds in the chicken compound, with an audible sigh of relief from Conrad. Conrad then helped Viola with her daily chore of feeding the chickens and ducks. He also assisted by repairing a broken section of the wooden chicken house and an insecure portion of the chickenwire enclosure. Viola told me that at the dinner table that evening her father's conversation was full of comments and questions about the chickens, ducks, and farms in general. She told me that it was obvious to her that her father really enjoyed the country setting there. Viola further stated that after her father had returned to England, his letters to her often mentioned how much he wished he could purchase a small farm and settle down to the peaceful serenity of the country life.

As for things that Conrad didn't like, a partial list would include his well-known fear of heights; the number 17; wearing neckties; eating puddings of any kind; and being interviewed by members of the press. One other idiosyncrasy of Conrad's was his inordinate dislike of corns on a woman's feet. No matter how beautiful a woman might be in her facial features and her other charms, if she possessed feet with unsightly corns or callouses, Conrad considered her unattractive.

Both Conrad and his daughter, Viola, had an intense fear of heights. Anything higher than a house, for instance, was too high for Conrad. Neither he nor Viola would climb to the top of the Eiffel Tower, for the splendid view, for example, when they were sightseeing in Paris. Neither he nor Viola would travel by airplane either, choosing to go by ship or train or car, as the situation demanded.



In 1934, Conrad was asked to pose for the talented Austrian sculptor, Felix Weiss, who carved this excellent likeness of the world-famous actor.

Conrad was rather superstitious, as many actors are, and he had a strong, lifelong aversion to the number 17. This quirk was based on many little incidents that seemed to haunt him throughout his life: Conrad's father died in 1917; his mother died on the 17th of January; also his brother, his only sibling, died on the 17th of the month; his grandmother died on the 17th of the month in Conrad's childhood. Even Conrad's beloved pet dog had died on the 17th of the month when Conrad was a young lad. Another time Conrad was riding in a car and it was involved in an accident with another vehicle. Conrad was injured by the sharp glass from the broken windows. When he got out of his vehicle and looked at the other car, he immediately noticed that the other car's license number was 2617. There were numerous other incidents of this type throughout his life. Probably they were mere coincidence. All the same, they became associated in Conrad's mind with impending death or misfortune to himself or a loved one.

I've noticed one additional coincidence concerning the number 17 and Conrad. The address of Conrad's residence at the time of his death was 617 N. Camden Drive. None of Conrad's previous residential addresses had contained the numerals 17.

Conrad's fear of heights often presented a problem for him in the course of his film work. When the script called for Conrad to ascend to a lofty height for a certain scene, Conrad would do the scene as required, but he would not linger at the height a moment longer than absolutely necessary.

One question frequently asked of Veidt by his fans, and by interviewers representing various film periodicals of the day, was this: "What is a typical film actor's day like?" Veidt's reply: "My working day would reel off like a film itself—so swift and varied. Up early in the morning, a quick continental breakfast of coffee and a sweet roll; then into the bus or truck and off to the studio or to an outside 'take' location, or to conferences and discussions among the director and film personnel about procedural questions and problems. Then script reciting and rehearsals, try-outs, location inspections, and more rehearsals. Then a brief and hurried lunch and mid-day break. And once again, work and more work. If night 'takes' have been scheduled, then we work after the evening meal on the shooting and do as many re-takes as necessary. Then finally, late at night, tired and worn-out, I tumble into bed. To awaken early and repeat the whole process the next day. On days when no film shooting or rehearsals were planned, I would go to a stage theater in town to meet the actors and directors and 'talk shop' about the legitimate theater. These are my two loves—the cinema and the legitimate theater. Without these two, I could not live. For me, a life without the drama and excitement of the world of the stage and cinema would be almost like a world without food or drink, or oxygen to breathe!"



Conrad helps Viola build a sand castle at the Bansin beach as Felicita lends her smiling encouragement.



In 1930, Veidt was invited by director E.A. Dupont to come to England to star in the German version of the film *Cape Forlorn* (shown in Germany under the title of *Menschen im Käfig*). Veidt accepted the offer,



A montage of photographs illustrating some of Veidt's film roles; and a family grouping in Hollywood in 1928, with Viola and Felicitas.

and while on location in England he took the opportunity to learn as much English as possible. He made an intensive effort and soon his English had improved tremendously. Not only in proper English usage and grammar, but also Conrad was beginning to use American slang in his conversations. He would frequently interject a "sure" or an "okay," etc. As his newly-learned skill in English gave Conrad more confidence, he gradually became more and more at home in England and with the English language and with the English people.

Although Conrad's proficiency in the English language increased immeasurably after he emigrated to England, he never quite lost his German accent. But to thousands of moviegoers, Conrad's accent was a definite asset. As one perceptive fan stated: "Conrad Veidt's accent was absolutely loaded with mystery and sex appeal."

Veidt was one of the most personable and congenial film stars in the cinematic firmament. Ever affable, urbane, and generous with his time, Veidt was a favorite of fans who clustered around him in Berlin, Vienna, Paris, London, Hollywood, New York, or wherever he happened to be. Whether at work on a movie location site, or on vacation between pictures, Veidt's tall, slim figure and elegant style soon made him the center of a large group of fans seeking his autograph.

At one autograph party sponsored by Conrad's studio (UFA), hundreds of his fans filled a huge ballroom at the Eden Hotel in Berlin on February



The Veidt family at home in Beverly Hills (circa 1927).

24, 1931. Conrad sat at a table, obliging his fans by signing the requested autographs and answering scores of questions about his movies and his personal life. Veidt was not one of the many haughty film stars who looked down on movie fans as nuisances and bores, and who treated their fans in a rude or surly manner.

In addition to autograph sessions and public appearances, Conrad also was appreciative of, and obliging with, the large amounts of fan mail his studios received for him. Veidt and his secretary tried to answer each letter.

Conrad was a voracious reader, enjoying fiction and nonfiction alike. One of the many reasons Conrad detested the Nazis was their policy of banning and burning books by authors who wrote great works of literature denouncing fascism and militarism. Conrad would sometimes quote the prophetic maxim of the great German author/poet Heinrich Heine. Heine had written: "Whenever they burn books they will also, in the end, burn human beings." For quite some time Conrad had been receiving reports from friends in Germany, describing the intolerable conditions there in the 1930s and 1940s.

Veidt related to his first biographer, Paul Ickes, the method he used to



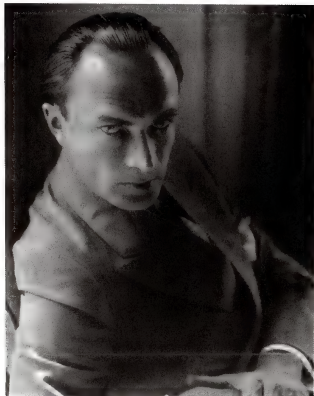
In 1932 Conrad his wife and daughter were invited to a children's party in honor of Charlie Chaplin. The party was held in Berlin and many notables and their families attended. Conrad and Felicitas Veidt are seen standing in the middle rear of this photograph. Viola Veidt is seen standing in the front at right, in a white dress, near Mr. Chaplin (seated, center). (Courtesy Stefan Lorant)

prepare for a film role. Veidt said: "For days or even weeks before filming, I withdraw into myself, as it were, concentrating on a kind of study of the soul. And soon I discover how the character I have to portray grows in me; how I am transformed into it. The intensity of the process almost frightens me. Before long I find, even before the cameras begin to turn, that in my daily life, I move, talk, look, and behave differently. The inner Conrad Veidt has become that other person whom I have to portray, or rather into whom my self has changed by autosuggestion. This state can best be described as one of being '*possessed*.'"

One of Conrad's favorite stories about his family concerned the time in 1932 when a special welcome party was held at the elegant Adlon Hotel in Berlin in honor of Charlie Chaplin, who was visiting Germany at the time. As Chaplin was well known as a friend of children, all of the prominent people who were invited to the party were encouraged to bring their children along to meet Chaplin. Veidt was one of the celebrities invited and he brought his wife Felicitas, and their daughter, Viola, who was six years old.

On this occasion, the world-famous comedian was dressed in a handsome new brown business suit. As Chaplin walked down the receiving line, he shook hands with the parents and with each child. Among the many famous guests in the line were Conrad's good friend and respected fellow actor, Alexander Granach, and his son. When Chaplin came to the Veidts' place in line, Conrad introduced his wife and daughter, saying, "This is the very funny movie star, Charlie Chaplin, whom you have seen in his very funny movies." Chaplin bowed to Mr. and Mrs. Veidt and returned the compliment by saying something flattering about Veidt's film career. Chaplin then shook hands with Viola. Viola, apparently having a mental image of Chaplin from his shabbily-dressed Little Tramp film roles, in which he invariably wore patched and baggy pants, a bowler hat, and old dilapidated shoes, gave the noted comedian a rather cool look. She then gazed at him from head to foot. As Viola's eyes came to rest on Chaplin's impeccable footwear, she said, "You can't be the real Charlie Chaplin. He has different shoes."

Chaplin was momentarily disconcerted by Viola's reply and her distrust. But he soon laughed heartily and told Conrad and Felicitas that he understood how Viola must feel. He then agreed to have a photo taken of himself and Viola, by a reporter, to be shown on the cover of a well-known German magazine.



In 1929, Conrad Veidt was asked to pose for a portrait by the world-famous photographer, Edward Steichen. Veidt consented and the result was this striking photograph.

# 15

## His Last German Films

THE FILM *CAPE FORLORN* was based on Frank Harvey's novel of the same name. This was a murder melodrama concerning a woman (Tala Birell) who was marooned with four men in a lighthouse on the North Sea coast. Co-starred with Veidt and Miss Birell in this absorbing film were Fritz Kortner and Heinrich George. Conrad gave a fine performance as the amoral Kingsley, who after being shipwrecked, takes refuge in the lighthouse. Once there, he soon proceeds to seduce the lighthouse keeper's wife. The suspense builds up to the climax, at which point a murder occurs. A fascinating film, with excellent acting by all members of the cast, and expert direction by E.A. Dupont.

After completion of *Cape Forlorn*, the Veidt family decided to move to the Berlin suburbs. Conrad and Felicitas chose an enchanting pink villa in Schmagendorf, just outside of Berlin. The villa had a beautiful Renaissance front door, a private tennis court at the rear, a hedge of wild cherries separating the villa from the neighbors' residence. At this time a new governess was hired for Viola.

While living in the Schmagendorf suburb in 1929, Viola kept pleading with her parents to buy her a dog. Felicitas had convinced Conrad that having a dog around the house would be highly unsanitary. So Conrad and Felicitas offered Viola something else instead, such as a tricycle, or a pedal-pushed race car, or a red wagon. But Viola kept begging insistently for a dog. Conrad finally relented and brought home a cute little wire-haired fox terrier puppy. Viola was overjoyed and soon named him "Tommy." Tommy was to be Viola's constant companion for the next fourteen years.

Viola liked to dress Tommy up as a baby and place him in her doll's perambulator. Tommy seemed to like riding in the pram. One day while walking down the street, pushing the doll's carriage, Viola was stopped by



Veidt and Tala Birell (right) co-starred in the 1930 British-German co-production of *Cape Forlorn*. Veidt gave a fine performance as the shipwrecked man who seduces the lighthouse keeper's wife. The suspense builds in this tale of passion, ending in murder.

an elderly lady who asked to see Viola's doll. Before Viola could warn her, the lady reached into the carriage and pulled back the blanket. This revealed Tommy with teeth bared, growling menacingly, and then snapping at the intruding hand. The lady hurriedly departed, with horrified shrieks. Conrad was greatly amused at hearing Viola's recounting of this incident at supper that evening. Although aware of Felicitas' feelings about dogs, Conrad was as fond of the little fox terrier as Viola was.

Conrad's next film was *Der Mann der den Mord beging* (The Man Who Murdered), which was directed by Kurt Bernhardt. The screenplay was based on the novel by Claude Farrere. The film had a strange, brooding atmosphere. It was a thriller set in Constantinople, Turkey, at about the turn of the century. Veidt played the role of the French attache, Colonel Sevigne, and his co-stars were Trude von Molo, Heinrich George, and Gregory Chmara. The emphasis of the film was on intrigue, international diplomacy, romance, elegant surroundings, and beautiful women. The film concerns a scandal among the diplomatic contingent in Constantinople. Veidt's character, Colonel Sevigne, falls in love with Mary, the wife of a British nobleman who abuses and mistreats her. When the French attache suggests to Mary that she obtain a divorce from her brutish

husband, she refuses, fearing that she would lose her little son in so doing. The story's climax is reached when the French attache attempts to help Mary, and a violent argument ensues between himself and the British diplomat. Sevigne is forced to kill Mary's husband in the fight. Sevigne then goes to the Turkish police ministry and confesses his crime to the police minister. The minister, wishing to keep the scandal quiet, suggests that Sevigne return to France at once and dismisses the affair, with no criminal prosecution. Veidt and the other principal actors gave excellent performances and Bernhard's direction was well-paced and expert.

Also in 1931, Erich Pommer produced and Erik Charell directed the very popular and very entertaining operetta on film, *Der Kongress Tanzt* (Congress Dances). Veidt was cast as the scheming and wily Prince Metternich of Austria, during the Congress of Vienna of 1814. Also



In 1931, Veidt appeared as Colonel Sevigne in the film *Der Mann der Mord beging* (The Man Who Murdered). Trude von Molo (at left, above) was Veidt's co-star in this drama of high passion and murder.



featured in this amusing, light-hearted film were Lilian Harvey, Willy Fritsch, Lil Dagover, and Alfred Abel.

This film was a charming blend of romantic flirtations and enchanting melodies set against a background of diplomatic intrigue and political realities of the Napoleonic era, and the film is peopled by a marvelous



Veidt stole the show in the highly entertaining 1931 romantic musical *Congress Dances*. Veidt's suave portrayal of the crafty intriguer, Count Metternich, at the time of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, was top-flight.

cast. The plot concerns, in part, Czar Alexander I of Russia falling in love with a millinery shop girl (Lilian Harvey). During the time the Czar is flirting with Christel, his double is attending the peace conference in his place. This diverting film was extremely popular then, and it is still shown in revival theaters. There is one memorable scene in which Lilian Harvey is riding through the countryside of Austria, singing the beautiful theme song of the film, with the country people she passes joining in. The name of this popular and catchy old German song is *Das gibt's nur einmal* (It Only Happens Once). A delightful scene indeed!

Erik Charell added many fine directorial touches to this film; and Karl Hoffman's camera work was equally first-rate. Director Charell and his scriptwriters went to great lengths to make this lavishly produced film as historically accurate as possible, as well as marvelously entertaining. Conrad was in all three language versions of this film (French, German, and English) and he dominated the film throughout.

Near the end of the film, a courier arrives at the ball. He brings an urgent message to Prince Metternich, advising that Napoleon has escaped from exile on the island of Elba and has returned to France. With this ominous news, the Congress delegates are shown leaving Vienna hurriedly, in fright.

To sum up, the film *Congress Dances* has a special charm about it. Even viewing it now, after more than half a century has gone by since its release, it holds up very well and doesn't seem as dated as many old photoplays do.

Another milestone for Veidt was the 1931 release *Die Andere Seite* (The Other Side), based on the very successful stage play *Journey's End* by R.C. Sherriff, which attempted to show the terrible waste, horror, and utter futility of war. Veidt had the prime role of Captain Stanhope, and he gave a fine performance as the bitter, heavy-drinking officer commanding a company of infantry in combat in World War I. Veidt's co-stars were Victor de Kowa, Theodor Loos, Paul Otto, and Friedrich Ettel. All members of the cast gave skilled performances.

This great film was among the best war films ever produced. The film's clear message: "Wars settle nothing, and bring only death, horrible misery and waste" incensed the authorities of the German government. Veidt stated to the news media that the film imparted a valid message, and he refused to recant his views on the subject, despite government opposition.

Also featured in the film was the stirring marching song from Ger-

many entitled *Wide Is The Road Back To The Homeland*, which was played and sung through the film. Veidt was in the German language version only. Heinz Paul's fine, spirited direction helped to produce a moving, convincing, sincere motion picture.

One interesting sidelight is the strangely prophetic aspect of the film title and the theme song. They predicted that in a short time (in reality only about one year later) Veidt would pass over to the other side (from Germany to England) and that the road back to his homeland would be very far (in reality, too far). In the near future Veidt *would* choose to adapt to a new culture, a new language, and new surroundings, becoming a voluntary exile from Germany.

The other notable film of 1931 was the Paramount production of *Die Nacht der Entscheidung* (The Night of Decision). This was directed by Dimitri Buchowetzky and featured Olga Tschechowa and Peter Voss. Veidt had the major role of General Platov in this gripping story. The plot concerns a love triangle set in Russia during World War I. A lovely woman (Miss Tschechowa) is in love both with an attractive general



The 1931 release *Die Andere Seite* (The Other Side) was a gripping war film in which Veidt (at left) portrayed Captain Stanhope, an infantry company commander in World War I combat. Theodor Loos (at right above) had a featured role in this film.

(Veidt) and with an eminent doctor, and the drama revolves around her efforts to choose between them.



Veidt appeared as General Platoff in the 1931 Paramount release *The Night of Decision*. This was a love triangle drama set in Russia in World War I.

In Conrad's next important film, released in 1932, he gave a distinguished portrayal of Rasputin, the evil Russian monk who had so much influence over Tsarina Alexandra and, indirectly, over Tsar Nicholas and the rest of the Russian court in pre-World War I Russia. This was the remarkable German film, *Rasputin, der ungekronte Zar* (Rasputin, the Uncrowned Tsar).

Veidt's elaborate make-up for the role took almost three hours to apply. Through the use of cosmetics, a wig and a heavy black beard, and with the skillful use of lighting, the result was a striking likeness to pictures of the real Rasputin.

Veidt's co-stars were Brigitte Horney, Elza Temary, Paul Otto, and Karl Ludwig Diehl. Adolf Trotz was responsible for the superb direction and pace of the film, one of the highlights of the cinematic year.

There have been, to the best of my knowledge, three silent films and nine sound films about Rasputin. In eleven of these twelve films, the peasant monk was pictured as an evil influence at the Tsarist court—

a man completely and utterly evil, with no saving graces. That viewpoint is held by historians today, most of whom believe that Rasputin was in fact a filthy charlatan who pretended to have a holy power to heal the sick. He apparently was an ignorant, licentious, crude, evil, opportunistic



Here we see Veidt as Rasputin in the 1932 film of the same name. The film depicted the rise and fall of the evil monk who had so much influence over the Tsar and his family in pre-World War I Russia. Hermine Sterler (right) plays the Tsarina.

scoundrel who had a baneful effect on Russian history and who contributed to the downfall of the Russian empire. Due to his influence at the royal court and to his meddling in government affairs, Rasputin had a legion of enemies. On the night of December 16, 1916, Rasputin was murdered by a group of nobles. The conspirators allegedly gave Rasputin



PUTTING ON THE GROOMING OF THE MADMAN



WORKING ON THE EYES



ARRANGING FOR BRASS



WORKING ON THE HAIR (THIS PICTURE WHICH SERVED AS MODEL IS SHOWN ON THE RIGHT)



A FULLER VIEW OF THE FINISHED MAKE-UP



A PROFILE VIEW OF THE FINISHED MAKE-UP



WITH THE EYES SET TO MATCH THE HAIR (THIS PICTURE WHICH SERVED AS MODEL IS SHOWN ON THE RIGHT)

During the filming of *Rasputin* in 1932, studio make-up artists transformed Conrad into a strikingly close resemblance to the original subject, the monk Rasputin, known as "The Holy Devil." Above we see the steps in this remarkable transformation.

enough poison to kill several husky men but somehow he remained alive. The murderers then had to carry the monk to the nearby Neva River and forcibly drown him to complete the assassination.

In the Trotz-Dymow-Veidt film *Rasputin, der ungekrönte Zar* version, an attempt was made to show Rasputin in a more objective light, downplaying his lecherous and crude behavior and stressing his attempts to heal the sick and his attempt to prevent war. Veidt, in his film role, attempted to portray Rasputin as an intelligent, interesting person with a sense of humor; a person who had a human caring side to his nature, who meant well but was weak in character and purpose.

The well-known Russian author, Ossip Dymow, who knew Rasputin personally, collaborated in the writing of the screenplay for this film. Author Dymow, director Trotz, and star Veidt all believed that Rasputin had been greatly misunderstood by the people of that day, many of whom called him "The Holy Devil." Dymow told Veidt that Rasputin had once said (before World War I): "There must never be a war between Germany and Russia." Rasputin, through his influence with the Tsar and the royal family, attempted to interfere with political and military matters in the hope of averting war.

Because of Dymow's original screenplay, and the sympathetic treatment of Rasputin's character by Trotz and Veidt, the film caused quite a sensation after it was exhibited in 1932. Regardless of which viewpoint is the correct and realistic one, Rasputin's life makes a fascinating subject for a film. Veidt's performance was remarkable for its sincerity and artistic originality.

Veidt had the talent and the personal magnetism to make audiences believe that Rasputin was not the "Holy Devil" he had been nicknamed by the Russian people. Whether we agree with the message conveyed in this film, we can't help but admire Veidt's acting prowess and artistry.

In addition to his cinema work, Veidt also appeared in long-term engagements on the stages of Berlin, Munich, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Warsaw, Odessa, Leningrad, Madrid, Paris, Geneva, and Lisbon. He took part as well in revivals of his previous stage successes.

When Viola was about six years old (1931), Conrad was offered the coveted opportunity of an extensive theatrical stage tour, with Elizabeth Bergner and other fine actors, through Austria and Czechoslovakia and parts of Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Switzerland. So another family move was now in order. As soon as Veidt had completed his scenes for the

filming of *Rasputin* he moved his family again. The pink villa was sub-let and the Veidts moved to Vienna, where they took temporary quarters in the sumptuous Hotel Imperial. The Hotel Imperial had formerly been the town residence of an Austrian archduke, and the luxurious interior reflected this status. There were huge crystal chandeliers, marble fireplaces in each suite, a gilded elevator cage, and an imposing marble staircase from the front hall, leading upstairs. On each side of this staircase there was a life-sized golden lion. These stone lions were a delight for Viola who would climb onto them, when she was out of visual range of her strict governess, and pretend to ride them. This often was done under the watchful but indulgent eyes of Papa Veidt. Also while in Vienna, Viola was enrolled into a private school where she began her education.

On March 11, 1931, Veidt's long-time friend, F.W. Murnau, died as a result of an automobile crash while en route from Hollywood to Monterey, California. Murnau was only forty-two at the time and had



Conrad was considered a natty dresser when between films or stage plays. However, once he became involved in rehearsals for a play or began acting before the camera at the film studio, he gave little thought to elegant clothing or his appearance off-stage.



shown extraordinary promise as a film director. He left a legacy of several superb films. Veidt heard the tragic news in Germany and mourned the death of his former director, business partner, and good friend.

Conrad's theatrical tour through central Europe was a great success. Conrad liked to mix occasional stage work in between cinema commitments and he invariably welcomed offers from the stage impresarios of Europe to return to his first love, the legitimate theater, if the tours could possibly be worked into his busy cinema schedule. At this point in his career, Veidt was in much demand from the film studios of Europe, often completing three or four films a year.

Whenever this particular tour would come anywhere near the borders of Austria, Conrad would try to take a day or two off from his tiring schedule and hurry to Vienna for a brief visit with his family. The tour was grueling, demanding, and exhausting, with long train trips by day and usually a performance each night in some town along the way. This meant a different hotel each night, and then on to the next town on the circuit. But in addition to their salaries, Conrad and Elizabeth Bergner and the other members of this repertory troupe were also rewarded by the sincere applause of the audiences along the way, especially in the smaller cities where big-name film and stage stars seldom visited. It was primarily this applause that made the long, tiring tour so worthwhile to Conrad and his fellow actors, knowing their stage productions were appreciated by the audiences.

While Conrad was on this lengthy stage tour, Felicitas and Viola managed to keep busy, and also did some sight-seeing, visiting such famous scenic sights as the Schönbrunn palace, the Stefansdohm, and other magnificent buildings. And of course, Felicitas and Viola also did some shopping in the smart stores on Kärtnerstrasse.

While in Vienna, Viola was invited to a birthday party given in honor of Heidede Sieber, Marlene Dietrich's daughter, who had just turned seven years old. Fifteen little girls, in their party dresses, and wearing some lipstick for the first time, had a grand time dancing and playing games in the company of their celebrity parents.

For this occasion Viola wore a special dress. It was a lovely green gown, a Paris original, brought back for her by her father on one of his business trips to the fashion capital city on the Seine. Conrad also brought back another Paris original creation: a glamorous black gown for Felicitas.

It was Conrad's habit, whenever he went out of town on cinema or



An early photo of Conrad, taken in Berlin about 1920, shows him in a pensive mood.



A favorite form of recreation: Conrad on one of the scenic lakes in Europe, circa 1930.

stage business, to bring back something for his wife and daughter. Although Viola would see the gift-wrapped packages her father carried into the house, and though she was burning with curiosity, she was too tactful to ask her father immediately what he had brought for her. Conrad didn't keep Felicitas and Viola waiting unnecessarily, and soon opened the gifts, to a chorus of excited "ooh's" and "ah's" from the two ladies.

While Conrad was on the stage tour, and Felicitas and Viola were living in Vienna, the Veidt family received a telephone call, advising them that there had been a burglary at their villa in Schmagentorf. As soon as Conrad was able to leave the tour for a day, he and his family returned to Berlin for a hurried inspection of their home. They found the villa to be an absolute shambles. Everything had been ransacked and most of their valued items had been stolen. The burglars had even slashed open the mattresses and upholstered furniture, apparently looking for hidden money, jewelry and other valuables. The theft insurance on the residence covered most of the loss but still it was most unsettling and disturbing to Conrad and his family.

After the theatrical tour of the provinces was completed, another move was necessary. This time the family moved to Berlin proper, to a house at Kaiserdamm 82. Conrad and Felicitas arranged for Viola to start school in earnest, immediately after getting settled. Viola had to get used to the frequent moves during her formative years, as an actor's career called for willingness to accept film and stage roles, wherever offered, if the role was otherwise suitable. And Felicitas, by the same token, had to inure herself to the same almost constant uprooting of their place of residence, as governed by the dictates of her famous husband's theatrical career. This placed a heavy strain on their marriage. Felicitas was happy as long as she and Viola could be with Conrad, or see him often when he was on a stage tour, or on motion picture location out of the country. But the frequent absences and irregular film schedules were becoming a source of irritation and unhappiness to Felicitas.

One thing that Conrad especially liked about the new house on Kaiserdamm was that it had an enormous sunken bathtub. Finally he had found a tub large enough for his 6'3" frame to stretch out in. Conrad loved to relax in this tub in hot water, with a tray of Harzerkäse cheese and a tall, cold drink. While there he would study his script for his next film. He would stay there for an hour or two. Conrad said this was the only place in his house that he could concentrate.

Occasionally, Conrad did study his new script while relaxing in his bathtub. But most of the time when studying his lines, Conrad would walk briskly up and down in his studio dressing room, or at his home, speaking his lines and trying to visualize the person he was to portray.

Sometimes learning the dialogue was difficult for Conrad. He found, on those occasions, that it helped him greatly to remember his lines if he walked and moved through the part. In so doing, he could relate the particular action called for in the script to the matching dialogue. As Conrad walked rapidly back and forth, he would gesticulate expressively with his hands, in company with his spoken lines. Conrad said that the pacing back and forth somehow helped him to get the feel of the part.

Conrad always tried to be home from the studio in time at least for Viola's bedtime story-telling and prayers. Sometimes he would arrive home in the evening, direct from work, still with traces of his make-up on. This was because he didn't want to waste any time at the studio removing the greasepaint, and thereby possibly miss his daughter's bedtime prayers. Viola didn't mind the smell of the greasepaint; in fact, she rather liked it. Father and daughter would then have a long, animated conversation, after which Conrad would read to Viola from Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. Viola especially liked the tales of *The Little Mermaid* and *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*.

Another favorite bedtime story of Viola's was a poem by Goethe called *The Erlking*. This sad tale concerned an elf who became king of all the Black Forest elves. Conrad's emotive reading of this ballad, complete with gestures and changes of voice, moved the seven-year-old Viola to tears, but she loved to hear her father read it to her.

Then Viola would say her prayers, Conrad would kiss her "goodnight" and, in so doing, he would sometimes leave a little smudge of his greasepaint on Viola's cheek and pillow, and Viola would snell it and fall asleep happily.

Conrad liked to relate the story of the first time that he had directed a screen test for a studio. It was in the early 1930s and a famous director had asked Conrad, as a favor, to direct some screen tests for him on several young actresses who were trying out for the feminine lead in a forthcoming motion picture. It was their first screen test and the potential actresses were quite nervous. Veidt directed each one in some brief scenes. Then he noticed one young actress named Luise who seemed, in spite of her nervousness, to have considerable talent as she performed her scenes

and spoke her lines. Veidt recognized her exceptional talent and encouraged Luise to continue to seek a career in motion pictures. When the screen tests were all completed, Veidt made his comments and recommendations on each of the actresses tested, including a strong favorable recommendation for the young actress Luise. However, he was over-ruled by the producers and Luise was not selected for the role. However, about two years later, Conrad noticed in a popular motion picture periodical of that day a picture and accompanying article about *Luise Rainer* having won an Academy Award for Best Actress of the Year! Conrad recalled the face in the magazine article as being the same young actress he had directed through her first screen test two years earlier!

The fact that Miss Rainer wasn't selected for the role, based on her screen test, and despite the enthusiastic recommendations for her acting and appearance from Veidt, shouldn't be considered as surprising or all that unusual. Miss Rainer was in good company in this respect, since a large number of major cinema stars failed their screen tests at one time or another. Here are just a few well-known film stars who failed their screen tests (in alphabetical order): Fred Astaire, Brigitte Bardot, Maurice Chevalier, Bette Davis, Clark Gable, John Garfield, Van Johnson, Myrna Loy, Marilyn Monroe, Laurence Olivier, Jane Russell, Gloria Swanson, Robert Taylor, Shirley Temple.

Veidt's next motion picture, made at the huge UFA studios at Neubabelsberg, was the absorbing mixture of drama and comedy in the excellent release of 1932, *Der Schwarze Husar* (The Black Hussar). This was another story based on the epic period of Napoleon's control of Europe, in which his victorious French Army was occupying Prussia. Veidt was cast as Rittmeister von Hochberg, a Black Hussar Regiment officer, who attempts to save a German princess from an unwanted marriage forced upon her by Napoleon for reasons of state expediency. The princess from Baden is abducted by Hochberg (Veidt) with her permission, to save her from the marriage she detests with the Polish prince selected for her. Gerhard Lamprecht's direction of this fine film was top-flight.

Incidentally, Viola informed me that in 1932, when she was seven years old, this film was the first of her father's movies that she ever saw. Predictably, she loved it. Viola related that she had not known that her father was an actor until she saw him on the screen as a gallant officer of the Black Hussar regiment in this entertaining tale of romantic intrigue.



In 1932, UFA released the absorbing mixture of drama and comedy entitled *The Black Hussar*. Veidt starred as the gallant officer of the Black Hussar regiment who saves a German princess in distress during the time of the Napoleonic wars.

Conrad's next film, released in 1932 by UFA/Gaumont/Fox, was the interesting science-fiction film *FP 1 Antwortet Nicht* (Floating Platform One Doesn't Answer). This was a fascinating motion picture which received many good reviews. The screenplay was co-written by Kurt Siodmak, from his own novel of the same name. Three language versions (French, German, and English) were filmed simultaneously, as was the custom in those days, to insure a wider market for the film. Each version had a different cast, as follows. The French version had Charles Boyer, Pierre Brasseur, Danelle Parole, and Jean Murat. The German version had Hans Albers, Sybille Schmitz, Paul Hartmann, and Peter Lorre in the main roles. The English version had Veidt in the principal role of Major Ellissen, with Leslie Fenton, Jill Esmond, Donald Calthrop, and Warwick Ward in fine supporting roles. Karl Hartl was the director of this exciting cinema.



Veidt is pictured here as Major Ellissen from the thrilling science-fiction melodrama of 1932, *FP I Doesn't Answer*.

Although the plot was basically quite interesting and the special effects used were really very well done, the pace of the film was much too slow-moving. There was also a love-triangle subplot in the film which could have been handled much better. Perhaps a large part of the charm and appeal of many older films comes from nostalgia, which makes an average motion picture seem considerably better than it really was. To see this film, *FP I Antwortet Nicht*, today would really show it to be badly dated, I suppose, but it was quite fascinating in its day. It might be noted here that this film (three films, actually) was shot on a small island in the Baltic Sea. Here a full-scale Floating Platform was constructed for use as the prime subject of the film.

The story concerns a huge floating platform that was constructed and stationed in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean for the purpose of allowing

large airplanes to "land" and refuel and then continue across the ocean to Europe or America. This, of course, was long before the present age of nonstop trans-Atlantic airliners. The plot centers around the sabotage efforts of foreign agents to destroy this mid-Atlantic aerodrome by overpowering the FP maintenance crew and then attempting to destroy the floating platform by releasing the compressed air from the air tanks that enabled the platform to remain afloat.

In the dramatic conclusion the floating platform, which is slowly sinking, is saved by Major Ellissen's dangerous but successful flight to summon help.

The special effects and technological expertise displayed in this futuristic film were quite remarkable for that day. It was really quite thrilling to see the huge three-engined airliners touch down on the metal runways in the little city of steel and glass floating in the middle of the ocean. This spectacular science-fiction motion picture was a commercial success and a fine showcase for Veidt's talents in portraying the part of the pilot/engineer Major Ellissen.



In the 1932 UFA science-fiction film *FP I Doesn't Answer*, the plot concerned a floating platform in the Atlantic Ocean where airplanes could land and refuel. Three language versions were made of this film: Veidt (center) played the pilot Ellissen in the English version; Hans Albers (left) in the German version; and Charles Boyer (right) in the French version.



During the filming of *FP 1*, Conrad took part in a musical interpretation of the charming song, *Where the Lighthouse Shines Across the Bay*. With the accompaniment of a chorus, Conrad gives a pleasing rendition—half singing and half speaking—of this sentimental favorite melody. Conrad's recording isn't on the film's sound track but was released commercially as a "spin-off" of the film itself. In the film the song is heard sung by the crew of the floating platform while they were enjoying some off-duty leisure.

At that time, 1933, Veidt's English still had a noticeable German accent to it. Perhaps because of that, the recording lay dormant for many years. Then an amazing thing happened. In 1980, in England, a radio disc jockey answering a request from a listener for Veidt's sentimental ballad about the girl waiting for her lover to return to "where the lighthouse shines across the bay," played the recording on his morning show. The response was startling. Immediately after that one playing, there was a flood of letters and phone calls to the radio station, requesting Conrad Veidt's "lighthouse" song. The station complied, playing the song frequently. Then the EMI Record Company released the song as a single in October, 1980. Then World Records Company produced an album entitled "Movie Stars Memories," which contained sixteen original performances by stars of the 1930s. This LP record features Veidt's recording of *Where the Lighthouse Shines Across the Bay*, as well as songs by John Mills, Jessie Matthews, and other British stars of that bygone era. Conrad's forgotten recording of 1933 had become a great hit of the 1980s.

It should be mentioned here that in 1932, Veidt received an invitation to attend a motion picture premiere at a large theater in London. Veidt was presented along with other celebrities of the day, to the reigning monarchs, King George V and Queen Mary. It was a gala occasion and quite an honor for Veidt. On being presented to the royal couple, Veidt was congratulated by King George for his fifteen years of exceptionally fine film work. Queen Mary mentioned to Veidt that she had thoroughly enjoyed his performance in the 1931 film *The Congress Dances*. Conrad bowed deeply and murmured his thanks.

Also in 1932, Veidt was requested by the editor of *Picturegoer Magazine*, of England, to write an essay on any motion picture topic that appealed to him, for publication in that periodical. Conrad chose the subject of how an actor should live his screen roles. To quote Conrad from that article: "To *live* his part is the ambition of every actor. Unless he



Conrad is shown here, playing cards, in a scene from an early film. Off-screen playing cards was a favorite pastime for Conrad. He and Felicitas often invited friends over to their home for an evening of card games.

convinces himself, he has little chance of convincing the public. And if he fails to do that, then his career will be a short one. On the screen, this necessity for self-conviction is extremely important. The general atmosphere of a film studio is not calculated to heighten the illusion. One sees all the mechanical devices used to make scenes."<sup>1</sup>

Then in 1933, *The Wandering Jew* was released by Gaumont-British. This was an absolutely fascinating story based on the popular play of the same name by E. Temple Thurston. The plot covers some sixteen-hundred years of history and the film is spectacular in scope. The story is in four phases: first, in Jerusalem at the time of the Crucifixion; next at Antioch in the Holy Land at the time of the First Crusade; then at Palermo in Italy in the 13th Century; and finally, in Seville, Spain at the

1. Article "Living My Parts," by Conrad Veidt. *Picturegoer Magazine*, September 3, 1932.



In the 1933 film *The Wandering Jew*, Veidt gave a skillful interpretation of the title character, in four episodes, covering a period of some sixteen-hundred years of history.

time of the hated Inquisition. Veidt does a masterful job of portraying the Wandering Jew in each of the mentioned phases. According to the famous legend, the Wandering Jew is condemned to wander the earth for eternity. In this fantasy film, though, he finally dies during the Spanish Inquisition, burned at the stake for his beliefs. Veidt's co-stars in this film, Felix

Aylmer, Anne Grey, John Stuart, and Marie Ney, all gave him excellent support.

Veidt was enthusiastic about his role in this film. Upon first reading the script, Veidt called the role "at once the most beautiful and the most complex one for which an actor could wish." Veidt also was fascinated by the racial implications of the story and commented that "the problems of a great people, the Jewish people, who can trace their history to biblical times, would make a marvelous film."

Also released in 1933 was the entertaining musical romance, *Ich und die Kaiserin* (I and the Empress) with Veidt in the role of the suave nobleman, Marquis Pontignac. Mady Christians had the role of the Empress Eugenie of France, and Lilian Harvey played the part of the young hairdresser. Heinz Rühmann was also a member of the very fine cast. Friedrich Hollaender directed this amusing photoplay for UFA.

In addition, director Hollaender composed the lyrics and music to the lovely melody *Wie hab' ich nur leben können ohne dich* (How Could I Have Lived Without You?) which was the featured song in this film.



Conrad loved animals. Here he is seen holding his dog "Mackie," a Sealyham terrier.

This was the last film made by Veidt in Germany before his exile from that tormented country. In the early 1930s he was amused to learn that he was mentioned in a popular little ditty of that period. German school children often would sing a song about movie stars, one stanza of which went like this:

"Es geht der Dolly	(Dolly has gone.)
Sie sitzt in Hollywood an einem Tisch	(She sits at a table in Hollywood)
mit Lillian Gish	(with Lillian Gish.)
Da sitzt der Harold Lloyd	(There sits Harold Lloyd)
und auch der Conrad Veidt"	(and also Conrad Veidt.)

The Dolly in the verse refers to Dolly Haas, a German leading lady of that period. There were other verses to the song, mentioning other film stars.

# 16

## Exile from Germany

WITH THE ADVENT OF ADOLF HITLER and the Nazi regime in his homeland (Hitler became chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933), Veidt had a strong premonition that the Germany he knew and loved so much was soon to be changed drastically, with a dark future for himself and his family.

Or as Veidt expressed it in his own words: "When I went back to Germany from Hollywood in 1929, I felt a strangeness in the air. It felt like the agitation just before a terrible storm. I tried to put my feelings aside; to go on working as before. I said to myself, 'It can't happen here in Germany!' But more and more I had this worrisome feeling that terrible things were going to happen in Germany."

Besides Veidt's own strong premonition about dark days ahead for Germany, there was also an ominous warning contained in Adolf Hitler's own words, uttered in one of his blustering speeches early in 1933: "There is a stern time coming. I shall see to that!"

On another occasion in the 1930s, Hitler made an even more ominous and threatening speech, in which he spoke these words: "Let there be no mistake. I shall remake the world in my image, or destroy it!" From our vantage point of hindsight in the 1990s, we can see that Hitler very nearly accomplished those two dreadful aims. On reading the above quoted words from Hitler's speech, in a British newspaper, Veidt didn't airily dismiss them as empty Nazi bombast, or as the ramblings of a braggart, as many people did. Veidt knew Hitler and his perverted Nazis were determined and dangerous men in a world whose leaders just wanted to ignore the problem. Veidt knew Hitler wanted nothing less than the enslavement of humanity.

Veidt had no sympathy for the Nazi New Order, as they called themselves, or the Third Reich, which the Nazis bragged would be "The Thousand Year Reich." He refused to cooperate with the Nazis, even though so many other members of the legitimate stage and cinema fields were helping in Nazi propaganda. This was in spite of the fact that Conrad had received some attractive offers from the leaders of the Third Reich to take part in the propaganda films, which extolled the virtues of the "Aryan Race" and vilified the Jewish people and many other nationalities and religions.



Father and daughter sharing a happy moment together at the Travemuende beach in 1931.

Although Conrad did not consider himself to be a person with deep interests in world problems, he nevertheless did have a considerable social conscience that would not permit him to ignore the violent acts and injustices of the Nazis in his homeland. It is, of course, true that the Nazis were abusing and persecuting primarily the Jewish people of Germany. But the Jewish people weren't the only ones persecuted by the Nazis. In addition to Jews, the Nazis attempted to eradicate Communists, Slavs, gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholics, Socialists and, of course, *anyone* who was politically opposed to the Nazi regime and its policies.

As the brave and outspoken German clergyman, Pastor Martin Niemöller, once expressed it: "In Germany, they first came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up."

For his "crime" of speaking out against the Nazis, Pastor Niemöller was sentenced to the Dachau and Sachsenhausen concentration camps, where he spent eight horrible years of imprisonment.

Veidt and many others agreed with Pastor Niemöller that the German people must oppose the Nazis. Veidt spoke out often against the Nazi party, during the early days before Hitler was appointed Chancellor. Later, after the Nazis were firmly entrenched in power, Veidt continued to speak out against them. For example, Veidt denounced the policies regarding the German cinema and stage arts. Veidt felt that the nationalization of the German cinema industry, and the complete control of the German legitimate theater by the Nazis, was too authoritarian; too prejudicial towards Jews, Catholics, and other minorities; and in the final analysis, was actually counter-productive to the German theater arts. With the Nazis overseeing all facets of the stage and screen, Veidt felt strongly that the creativity and quality of the German stage and cinema would deteriorate drastically.

The diminutive and club-footed Joseph Goebbels, formerly Hitler's campaign manager in the Nazi Party, was now glorying in his pompous new title of Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment in the Third Reich. As such, he was taking steps to bring the German cinema industry and the theater arts, as well as the press and radio media, under



his complete domination.

Goebbels already had Alfred Hugenberg in his camp. Hugenberg was a wealthy, reactionary owner of several newspapers, who later gained control of the UFA and Deulig studios, and became an early supporter of Hitler. Hugenberg's control of UFA and Deulig, two of Germany's largest film producing companies, gave Goebbels the necessary base for producing nationalist, pro-Nazi propaganda films.

The events that followed Goebbels' take-over of the cinema and stage spheres proved Veidt correct. There was a conscious effort by the Nazi government to influence and direct the course and manner that German artists of all types (painters, writers, sculptors, actors, musicians, theater and cinema directors, etc.) took to express their sense of art.

Another early directive issued by Goebbels in 1933 called for the purging of all persons of Jewish descent from the German cinema and theater. This dreadful ruling deprived Germany of many of its best stage and screen artists and forced these talented people to flee from Hitler's Europe.

As partial evidence of this intention, I refer to one of Goebbels' early speeches. In 1933, speaking to the heads of the German motion picture industry, Goebbels stated that the German film would not be produced for mere entertainment alone. Instead, it would have the purpose of conquering the minds of the people of the world, as the advance guard of the victorious German military forces. The German films, he declared, would have to conform to Nazi ideology, and thereby disseminate Nazi propaganda.

In addition to the monstrous and unforgivable toll of human death, degradation, and misery caused by the Nazis, they also caused the highly-regarded pre-1933 German array of fine arts to suffer. The production of worthwhile stage and screen entertainment, for example, that was world-famous before 1933, changed to mere mediocrity after Hitler came to power. The Nazis produced no form of art that was of any distinction or value. All forms of the fine arts in Germany under Goebbels' dictatorial control suffered profoundly.

Martin Niemoeller and Conrad Veidt were but two of the many German voices raised against the Nazis. Stefan Lorant, a distinguished author and magazine editor, was another who recognized early on the Nazis would be evil for Germany and tried to awaken Germany to the danger of Hitler. For his opposition, Lorant was imprisoned by the Nazis.

But unfortunately, the vast majority of the German people either believed in Hitler's false promises or were too apathetic to oppose the Nazis, to their eventual tragic sorrow.

It wasn't until the late 1930s, perhaps 1938 to 1939, that the majority of the German populace began to realize that they were, in effect, living in a gigantic camp of fear. But by that time it was much too late to do anything about it—the Nazis were too firmly in control. All of which supports the old proverb: "Evil flourishes when good men do nothing."

It was due to the insane policies of Hitler, Goebbels, Goering, Streicher, Hess, and company that Germany lost the irreplaceable talents of the following giants of the German stage and cinema (in alphabetical order): Albert Bassermann, Elizabeth Bergner, Kurt Bernhardt, Felix Bressart, Paul Czinner, Mady Christians, Marlene Dietrich, William Dieterle, Alexander Granach, Karl Grünne, Oscar Homolka, Fritz Kortner, Anatole Litvak, Francis Lederer, Fritz Lang, Peter Lorre, Carl Mayer, Joe May, Mia May, Asta Nielsen, Richard Oswald, Erich Pommer, Lilli Palmer, Max Reinhardt, S.Z. Sakall, Curt Siodmak, Robert Siodmak, Conrad Veidt, Josef von Sternberg, Robert Wiene, Anton Walbrook, Billy Wilder, Kurt Weill, and many others of tremendous talent and creative ability.

For one small example of Goebbel's irrational policies, let me cite his ruling regarding the film *Congress Dances*. Goebbels was so anti-Semitic that he not only refused to permit Jewish personnel to take part in current German film production (in any category of work: producer, director, actor, camera man, stage technician, art designer, etc.) he also ordered one of Veidt's famous and popular films withdrawn from exhibition. This film was *Congress Dances*, released by UFA in 1931, in which Veidt portrayed the crafty Austrian statesman, Prince Metternich, at the Congress of Vienna during the Napoleonic era. Although the film was politically harmless, and more of a musical romance than a serious drama, Goebbels ordered it banned because Jews *had been* members of the production team!

Thus it was impossible for Veidt to overlook the trend and direction the German government was pursuing in the 1930s. There was the frightening, and increasingly frequent, sight of hordes of Brownshirted Nazis parading through the city streets, carrying dozens of swastika-ed flags, and with the deafening music of horns and drums. Gangs of Nazi bullies were roaming the streets, beating up anyone they suspected of being a Communist or of being anti-Nazi.

One example of the extreme manner in which the Nazis could influence the German theater, and intimidate theater personnel, was their "corrective inspections." These were conducted on theaters employing Jewish (or other "inferior" races) actors, actresses, directors, etc. When the Nazis learned that a theater in the area was having an opening night for a new play, they would examine the names and family backgrounds of all cast members and theater personnel for traces of "tainted" Jewish blood. If they ascertained that a member of the cast was Jewish, the head of the local Nazi party for that area would notify the theater manager that he would require twenty-five seats in the front row reserved for himself and his Brown Shirt associates. On opening night, just before the curtain rose, these Nazi uniformed bullies would march into the theater and take their seats in the front row. Then as the play proceeded, they would yell out offensive racist remarks and throw objects onto the stage (pieces of garbage, broken pieces of cobblestones and bricks, stink bombs, etc.) at the Jewish actor. Usually one night of these tactics would be sufficient. The theater manager would notify the Jewish actor that his services were no longer required.

These were not just isolated incidents but formed a pattern that occurred frequently throughout Nazi Germany after the advent of Hitler. It was this sort of Nazi behavior that Veidt could not tolerate. Even though he himself was not the target of these rules and tactics, he loathed the Nazi mentality that bred this type of behavior.

When Joseph Goebbels took over the ministry which controlled the German film industry, in 1933, one of his first orders was that all stage and screen actors and actresses would have to join the National Socialist Actors Guild of Germany. In addition to paying large dues to the Guild, the members were expected to embrace the theories, beliefs and practices of the Nazi Party. This requirement was abhorrent to Veidt and he refused to join the Guild, or endorse it in any way.

So it was that Veidt could not abide the drastic changes that were taking place in his native Germany after 1932 with the coming of Hitler and his cohorts. It wasn't just a difference in who occupied the Reichs Chancellery, after General Paul von Hindenburg stepped down as President. It was a wholly different atmosphere in the country and Veidt felt a palpable sense of impending doom and urgency in each passing day. This was no climate for an artist of any type.

At about this time the Nazi regime introduced a new word into the

German vocabulary: "Gleichschaltung." This combination word meant that the Nazis intended to re-make all phases and aspects of German life in accordance with Nazi doctrine. This would be done by shaping and molding the German people's minds and actions into an "acceptable norm" by forcing the Germans to conform to the Nazi model. This type of thought control was monstrous to Veidt and he decided he could not remain a citizen of Germany any longer.

In the early days of the Nazi movement, Hitler, Goering, Goebbels, Hess, and the rest of the Nazi hierarchy thought of Veidt as being a German national asset; a veritable treasure for the German film and theater. They were eager to recruit Veidt into the ranks of the Nazi party. Goebbels, as Minister of Propaganda, offered many valuable inducements to Veidt to join the Nazi movement. Veidt was offered starring roles in propaganda films that glorified the Nazi dogmas of war, militarism, unquestioning submission and obedience to government authority, Teutonic patriotism and the false claims of "Aryan superiority."

Veidt refused all the proffered enticements. The award of the title "Artist of the State" or "Actor of the State" was repugnant to Veidt when the state issuing that award was controlled by fascist murderers. Veidt was an intelligent and articulate individual who recognized early that the dangers inherent in the Nazi doctrines of hate and aggression foretold a perilous future for Germany, if unchecked.

Often Veidt and his many actor friends, from both stage and screen, would meet at a restaurant after a busy day of rehearsals at a theater or film shooting at a film studio. In addition to talking animatedly about the usual sort of actors' gossip, the subject of Nazi government policies would come up and the actors would discuss their feelings about the new regime. Some of the actors felt the Nazis would bring order and discipline and a sense of purpose to the seemingly floundering and indecisive government that characterized the Weimar republic after World War I. Veidt, however, spoke eloquently and sincerely to his friends, warning them of misery, hardship and tragedy to come for the German people under the Nazi rule.

Also during this period, Conrad's marriage to Felicitas had sadly ended, and after trying desperately to work things out, and failing, Conrad and Felicitas agreed to a trial separation. The separation continued and eventually led to a complete divorce. While enjoying the occasional visits to other cities, Felicitas wasn't too happy with the peripatetic life of an

actor, or of an actor's wife. She missed the security and the smooth, well-ordered existence of settling down in one location and staying there, year after year.

A rather unusual arrangement resulted from the divorce, in regard to Viola. By the terms of the divorce settlement, Conrad obtained custody of his daughter. This action greatly pleased Conrad and Viola. But on further reflection, Conrad realized that due to the peripatetic nature of his acting career, he would probably not make as good a parent for Viola as Felicitas would. Conrad knew there would be many occasions when he would be away from home on location filming a motion picture. There would also be stage commitments which would require Conrad to go on a theatrical tour to many European cities. During these periods he would be living in hotels and would be almost continually traveling from one town to another. Conrad felt that he would see very little of Viola and felt that she would receive better care and proper parental supervision from her natural mother. Therefore, Conrad voluntarily surrendered custody of Viola to Felicitas.

This decision was an extremely difficult and painful one for Conrad to make, as he loved Viola very much and wanted her with him as much as possible. But Conrad felt that he must think first and foremost of Viola's welfare and not of his own preferences. So this arrangement was made official, with this proviso: Viola was to live with her mother until Viola reached adulthood and Viola was permitted to spend her summer vacations and her Christmas vacations with her father. These happy holiday periods were sometimes spent at Conrad's home in England and sometimes Conrad and Lily would meet Viola on the Continent and they would stay at a resort area in France or Switzerland.

Conrad was especially concerned with the effect the separation would have on his beloved daughter. So there was a tearful explanation and goodbye to Viola, who was about seven years old at this time. Conrad assured Viola that he would call her or write to her every day, if at all possible, and this he did. Also he told Viola that he would arrange for her to come and visit with him each year during the summer school vacation. Conrad told Viola that he would always love her, even though he and Felicitas had to separate.

So Conrad was alone again. After two unsuccessful marriages, Conrad was quite bitter about the institution of marriage. He liked to quote to his friends the famous words of the French writer, Montaigne: "Marriage is

like a cage. One sees the birds outside desperate to get in, and those inside desperate to get out." Conrad vowed to himself "Never again!"

So it was that Conrad moved out of the family residence on Kaiserdamm Street and took a small apartment in Berlin, at #42 Schluterstrasse.

But on March 30, 1933, Conrad married for the third time. This time to a lovely and charming Hungarian lady, Ilona Barta Prager, better known to her friends as Lily. Lily was born on July 25, 1901, in the town of Miskolc, Hungary, the daughter of a well-to-do merchant, Eugen Barta. Lily went to high school in Vienna and then attended a finishing school in Lausanne, Switzerland. In 1924, Lily married Paul Prager and for a while they were happy. However, the marriage ended in divorce in 1932. After the divorce, Lily became the co-owner of a cabaret on Ranckestrasse in Berlin. The cabaret was called "The Two Lillies" after the two women who owned and operated the nightclub (both ladies having the first name of Lily). This cabaret soon became a popular nightclub in town, where stage and screen actors and other celebrities would often meet for a drink, conversation, dancing, and to watch the floor show.

It was at this cabaret that Conrad first met Lily. It happened this way. Conrad said that a friend of his, Eduard Wallach, had invited him to a cabaret in Berlin one evening for a drink and some conversation. The conversation was usually part social and part business. The business end of it having to do with possible offers from stage and cinema producers. While at the cabaret Mr. Wallach introduced Conrad to the co-owner of the club, Lily Prager. Conrad complimented Mrs. Prager on the charming ambience of the club. Lily, almost nine years younger than Conrad, was a pretty, vivacious and intelligent woman, and Conrad immediately felt a strong attraction toward her. Conrad began to visit the club quite often after that night. Lily, for her part, was also attracted to the tall, handsome actor with the magnetic personality and charm. It was obvious to all persons present in the club that Lily and Conrad had eyes only for each other. The friendship between Conrad and Lily grew gradually and matured until finally they were married in March, 1933.

As they were of different religious faiths (Lily being of Jewish descent and Conrad of the Protestant religion) a church wedding was not appropriate. Instead, Conrad and Lily were married in a civil ceremony at the Berlin city hall. It was a simple but dignified ceremony. Lily was attended by her sister and the wedding party consisted of a few close

friends. After the wedding ceremony and a brief but joyous reception, Conrad and Lily left Berlin for a delightful ten-day honeymoon on the Isle of Capri, across the bay from Naples, Italy. Capri is a romantic spot, chosen by thousands of newlyweds over the years as the ideal place for their honeymoon. Conrad described Capri as "being unbelievably lovely, with a sea that is unbelievably blue."

After the honeymoon, the bridal couple returned to Berlin where Conrad found temporary quarters in a nice section of the city. However, the matter of Lily's religious persuasion became an increasingly serious and frightening concern for the newlyweds in the highly anti-Semitic political climate then emerging in Nazi Germany. This was one more factor in Conrad's reluctant but inevitable decision to leave Germany. From this time on, there followed the years of his emigration from Germany, with Conrad and Lily living in Switzerland, England, France, and the United States for varying periods of time.

Since Conrad was steadfast in his opposition to the Nazis and their dreadful policies, he made it abundantly clear that he would not cooperate with them in any way. On one occasion one of the Nazi government ministers sent Conrad an official questionnaire to be completed by him and returned to the government office. To refuse to fill out the official document would have caused Conrad's arrest. So Conrad filled out the questionnaire completely and returned it within the allotted time. However, in the space marked for the person's race and religion, Conrad printed, in large block letters, the one word "JUDE" (Jew). Although Conrad was not Jewish himself, he deliberately did this for two reasons. One reason was to irritate the Nazi officials with this form of passive resistance to their cruel and insane anti-Semitic policies. The other, and more important reason, was to express his belief that all men are brothers, regardless of nationality, race, religion, or color.

Of course, the Nazis resented this, and Veidt's uncooperative attitude infuriated them. So they pursued a strange policy of alternately coaxing Veidt with extraordinary offers in German films, to swing violently to the other extreme and threaten him with dire troubles for himself and his family. At times they made things as difficult for Veidt as they could. For instance, when Veidt wished to travel to England, under the terms of his film contract, to do some location shooting, the Nazi bureaucrats caused him the greatest difficulties in obtaining permission to leave the country, and delayed his departure considerably.

In addition, during this period the Nazis even attempted to "persuade" Veidt to divorce his Jewish wife, Lily, for the simple reason that she was Jewish! This Conrad flatly rejected, refusing to even discuss the matter with them. This attitude also hardened the mutual loathing between Veidt and the Nazis.

Although Veidt didn't remain in Germany throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, and therefore didn't see for himself the terrible things the Nazis were doing to anyone who opposed the government or thought differently than the "official policy," he did hear from his friends and associates in Germany. He followed the events there in Germany very closely, partly because of his general interest in his homeland, partly because of his interest in the German cinema and stage, and most of all because of his concern for his ex-wife, Felicitas, and his daughter, Viola, who were still there and who would probably remain there.

Conrad knew this was a far different Germany than the country he had grown up in. These sadistic Nazis were committing cruel and inhuman atrocities to anyone opposing them. As one little example of the Nazi mentality, the German government of the Nazi era was to adopt the French guillotine as a method of execution. But the Nazis added a barbarous refinement of their own. Instead of having the condemned prisoner lying face down at the guillotine, as was customary, the Nazis forced the prisoner to lie on his back, so that he could see the deadly blade descending on him!

Later on, after Conrad had left Germany and was residing in England, the Nazis continued to make him fabulous offers to return to Germany and work in motion pictures which had clear Nazi propaganda messages in them "for the good of the Fatherland." Veidt either refused these offers outright on receipt or did not even bother to answer them. However, after Veidt began to appear in anti-Nazi films in England and America, he received ominous threats from the Nazis. The Nazis then placed Veidt's name on their official blacklist—the Gestapo's arrest list (or *Sonderfahndungsliste*) in the latter part of the 1930s, as being an enemy of the German Third Reich. The Ministry of Propaganda also banned all of Veidt's films from exhibition in Germany and Austria. From this time on the Nazis consistently belittled Veidt's work and his contribution to the film and the stage.

I have observed in some film history books, reference books, and periodicals about the cinema, that their entry on Conrad Veidt lists him as



being of Jewish descent. This is incorrect, and it may be due to his defiance of, and loathing for, the Nazis. As stated earlier, the Nazis had sent Veidt an official questionnaire to fill out and return to one of their ministries, which document contained a long list of personal questions about himself and his family. As a means of passive resistance to the Nazis, and a way to show his contempt for them, he completed the section of the form entitled "RACE/RELIGION" with the one word "JEW" in large capital letters. This was probably the beginning of the mistaken theory that Veidt was Jewish, but in reality he was not. He had great sympathy for the plight of the Jewish people in his homeland, Germany, and elsewhere too, and of course, he had married a Jewish woman, his third wife, Lily, and he supported Jewish relief organizations considerably. So it was altogether impossible for Veidt to collaborate with the Nazis in films or any endeavor.

There were, however, many German and Austrian film and stage actors, directors, producers, scriptwriters, etc., who did collaborate with the Nazis in making propaganda films and in assisting the government of the Third Reich in other ways. A very small percentage of them did this from a real sense of conviction; because they actively sympathized with the Nazi goals and methods. However, the overwhelming majority of the collaborators did so under the belief that this was the only way they could save their theatrical careers.

Numbered among them were four of Veidt's long-time contemporaries of stage and screen, from the early days of their working together in the Reinhardt repertory troupe, and through several early silent films, and elsewhere in the theater: Paul Wegener, Emil Jannings, Werner Krauss, and Heinrich George. I am unsure if they had latent Nazi leanings prior to 1933 and then came out into the open only after the Nazis came to power, or if this was primarily an opportunistic arrangement to preserve their theatrical careers. At any rate, they did collaborate with the Nazi regime in the area of racist propaganda motion pictures.

I understand that at the time Hitler became chancellor of Germany, Emil Jannings was in Paris, working on a Franco-German co-production film. When Jannings heard the news of Hitler's ascendancy to power, he rushed through his final scenes at the studio, and then hurried back to Berlin. There he immediately offered his services to the Nazis, who were elated to have such a famous actor for their propaganda purposes.

Jannings collaborated with the Nazis in films and did their bidding. He

was appointed by the Nazis to an important position in one of their government ministries which controlled the German nationalized film industry. One of his duties was to recruit new actors for the Nazi propaganda films. In recognition of his propaganda work for the Nazis, Jannings received a medal in 1938 from Goebbels. He was also appointed as managing director of the Tobis Film Company of Germany. Jannings' final "honor" from the Nazis was the title of "Artist of the State," awarded to him in 1941.

I understand that in 1940 Werner Krauss agreed to take part (nay, more than just agreeing to take part, he did so eagerly and voluntarily) in the Joseph Goebbels-sponsored version of Veidt's earlier (1933) film success in England, *Jew Süss*. But whereas the English version depicted the oppression and persecution experienced by the Jewish residents of Germany, the Nazi version in general, and Krauss' performance in particular, was such an exaggerated caricature of the Jewish stereotype that movie-goers in other parts of the world were sickened and disgusted by the film. Krauss was so anti-Semitic that he arranged with the producers of the film for himself to play the parts of several Jews in the film, thus allowing himself the opportunity to give each role his intended message of spite and ridicule toward Jews.

The pioneer stage and film actor and director, Paul Wegener, starred in several Nazi propaganda films. For his collaborationist work for the Nazi regime Wegener received from Goebbels the title of "Actor of the State." As for Heinrich George, as a reward for his pro-Nazi propaganda film work, George was appointed director of the Schiller Theater in Berlin by the Nazis.

As the director of this theater, George began the practice of calling the theater employees together periodically for one of his bullying speeches of "motivation and encouragement." During one of these speeches, the name of the German leader, Adolf Hitler, was mentioned. Heinrich George had become such a rabid Nazi sycophant that at this point in his speech, he shouted to his subordinates, "We are talking about our Führer, do you hear? Get down on your knees, everybody, to our great leader!"

Other film stars of the 1930s who were Nazi sympathizers, besides Wegener, Jannings, Krauss, and George, were Olga Tschechowa (who co-starred with Veidt in *Der Nacht der Entscheidung*), Leni Riefenstahl, Zara Leander, and Gustav Gründgens.

It is sad to see people, of such great acting talent as these mentioned

artists, prostitute themselves to a regime as evil as the Nazis were.

At this time Veidt was faced with a grave dilemma. Should he remain in Germany, his homeland that he loved, to be near his family, his friends, and his business associates of the cinema industry, while he was at the peak of his chosen profession? Dark clouds loomed large over Veidt's future, with an increasingly hostile Nazi government threatening his family, his career, and his very life with their demands that Veidt submit and cooperate with the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda, or suffer the severest consequences. Or, thought Conrad, should he abandon his homeland and seek sanctuary elsewhere, with the slim hope that he could continue working as a film actor? Could he find a country for his fiancée that was free of the rabid anti-Semitism that was prevalent in Germany? Could he find a country that would offer him challenging work as a film actor?

Veidt later told a reporter about his feelings at the time in late 1932: "To leave Germany meant learning to live and act in a new language, in a new country. But I felt that I might be happier doing that than continuing to act and live in Germany. I was beginning to feel like a stranger in my own country. My parents were dead. My friends and film associates no longer seemed to have the same ideals as I did. The Nazis seemed to be everywhere. And most of all, I had this strange feeling that terrible things were going to happen in Germany."

And if he should decide to leave Germany, would the Nazi hierarchy permit him to leave? All of these thoughts were weighing heavily on Conrad's mind, affecting his work, his sleep, and his complete outlook.



Conrad and Viola acquired a nice suntan as they enjoyed the sun, sea, and sand at the Bansin seashore in 1932. Father and daughter spent some pleasant time together on what proved to be their last visit to one of their favorite vacation areas. Felicitas took this photograph a few months before she and Conrad separated.

During this difficult period, while trying to decide what to do, Conrad considered several European countries as possible havens from the Nazi Germany he must leave. Among those countries he considered were Austria, Switzerland, France, and England. His final choice was England, where a dynamic and thriving film industry was established. Of equal importance to Conrad and Lily was the fact that England had a liberal and democratic form of government in which anti-Semitism was forbidden by law and custom.

Another reason for Conrad's decision to settle in England was his intention to improve his command of the English language so as to establish himself in English-speaking films. Conrad assumed (correctly, as it turned out) that if he could appear in English language films in Great Britain and America, those films would be exhibited to a much larger, worldwide audience than the limited distribution to be had for either German language films or French language films. Although Conrad did learn to speak English clearly and fluently, he was never able to lose his German accent completely. However, in the opinion of most of his fans, the remaining German accent was not a drawback but it gave instead an added charm to his speech.

Thus in December, 1932, under very emotional circumstances, Conrad came to the reluctant decision that he must leave Germany soon. He realized that he could no longer tolerate the Nazi dictatorial control of every facet of German life. He must leave Germany as a protest against the Nazi policies of hate and persecution, mind control, strangulation of the fine arts, to say nothing of their imperialistic aggression in the area of Nazi foreign policy. Veidt realized that his leaving would have little or no effect on the Nazis but he felt it was the only thing he could do to express his feelings toward the regime in power. For each person, famous or not, who left Nazi Germany, for whatever reason—freedom of religion, freedom of artistic expression, freedom from fear, etc.—was an embarrassing statistic against the Nazi New Order. Each emigration was a slap in the face to the Nazi propaganda machine: if Nazi Germany was so wonderful, why were so many thousands of Germans leaving the Fatherland?

Over the next several months, from December, 1932 to April, 1933, Veidt completed the myriad details and arrangements necessary for his departure from Germany. He concluded the final sad divorce agreement with Felicitas, and assisted Felicitas and Viola in settling into their

comfortable home, and made arrangements for a generous allowance to be paid each month for their support. He applied for and eventually received permission to emigrate to England and take up new residence there. The Nazi ministries hindered and delayed Veidt every step of the way, insisting on a multitude of documents from Veidt before he could leave. They also delayed interminably the transfer of his savings from German banks to an English bank account.

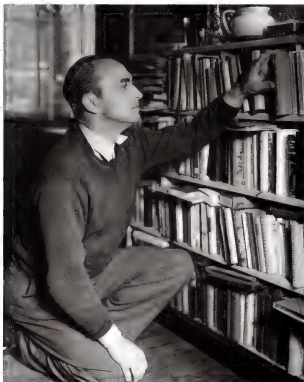
While Conrad was making the complicated arrangements to leave Germany permanently, he was very much concerned about the telephone-tapping that was becoming quite prevalent in Germany. Anyone who was suspected of anti-Nazi thoughts or activities often had his home and business phones tapped. Conrad was becoming almost paranoid about it, to the point that he refused to discuss his future business or personal plans over the phone. He would instead make these long-distance calls to London from Vienna or Prague rather than risk any telephonic eavesdropping by such fanatical Nazi state security agents as the Schutzstaffel (SS) or the Geheime Staatspolizei (Gestapo). The German people began to refer to this oppressive period as the time of "Adolfitis," when the Gestapo men were everywhere and citizens were never sure that Hitler's rabid followers were not monitoring their conversations.

Conrad asked his many friends and associates in the cinema industry to assist him in finding gainful employment with the British film industry and he was delighted with the response from these friends and associates, who supplied Conrad with letters of introduction to several important cinema figures in Great Britain. Conrad's preparations to leave were finally completed in late March, 1933, and he and Lily departed Germany in late April, 1933.

Less than a month after Conrad and Lily had left Germany they were saddened and distressed by another aspect of "Nazi culture and enlightenment" that occurred in Germany on May 10, 1933. On that date, on Berlin's broad Unter den Linden boulevard, near the University of Berlin, there was held a torchlight parade at midnight consisting of thousands of students. An enormous pile of books had been gathered there, and the students, at a signal from their Nazi leaders, threw their torches onto the pile of books. A conservative estimate was that 20,000 books were burned that shameful night in Berlin. This event was not a chance happening but was the first of many similar book burnings that were orchestrated and carried out in many other German cities by the Nazis, with the

enthusiastic approval and support of Reichsminister Goebbels.

Many of the books were written by German authors, such as Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Alfred Einstein, Stefan Zweig and Erich Maria Remarque, as well as many world-famous foreign authors, such as H.G. Wells, Jack London, Andre Gide, Emile Zola, and Helen Keller. Some of



Conrad was a voracious reader, enjoying both fiction and non-fiction. One of the many reasons Conrad detested the Nazis was their policy of banning (and burning) great books by authors who wrote against fascism, militarism, and prejudicial racism. This picture was taken in Conrad's home in London in 1938.

these authors were of Jewish descent but many were not. Apparently, *any* author who wrote *against* fascism, militarism, racism and international aggression, and *for* world peace, freedom, and democracy was considered to be "subversive and dangerous to Nazi goals." The fact that this book-burning trait had not been seen in the world since the Middle Ages gives a clear idea of the latest type of mentality that would initiate and sponsor such an atrocity, i.e., the Nazi leaders' fascist mentality.

The Nazis not only regulated the type of books that would be available to the German people but their control was complete over every facet of German culture, to include music, radio, motion pictures, newspapers, magazines, the theater, and the other fine arts. This was especially sad because the quality of culture in Germany had been so high prior to 1933.

Conrad and Lily, newly arrived in England in late April, were just getting settled in their new home when they read in the newspapers the sickening news of the book-burning incidents in Berlin, Munich, Nuremberg, and other German cities. Conrad was shocked and thoroughly ashamed that such atrocities could occur in his homeland. Conrad consoled himself with the belief that though the Nazis could destroy the books, the thoughts, and ideals expressed in those books would not die but would live and flourish long after Hitler and his gangsters were dead. Lily, though not German by birth, was equally ashamed and distressed at the despicable actions of the Nazis who carried out this calamity.

Although Goethe, one of Germany's pre-eminent writers, lived and died long before the Nazi era, one might suppose he was describing an evil and oppressive German government similar to the odious Nazi regime when he wrote the following comment in the early 1800s: "I have often felt a bitter sorrow at the thought of the German people, which is so estimable in the individual and so wretched in the generality."

# 17

## A New Homeland—A New Beginning

NOT LONG AFTER his arrival in England, and after finding suitable living quarters for himself and his new bride, Lily, Conrad decided to contact some of the prominent film producers in England, with letters of introduction to them from German film industry executives.

One of the letters of introduction given to Conrad was addressed to Mr. Michael Balcon, of Gaumont-British studios. Balcon had made a remarkable name for himself, since 1922 in the silent film days and into the sound film era, as a resourceful, versatile, and skillful director of many successful films. He was now the head of production for Gaumont-British, which was in 1933 one of the largest film producing companies in Europe.

When Conrad met with Michael Balcon and discussed possible options, Balcon advised him that Gaumont-British would indeed be happy to offer him a long-term contract. As a matter of fact, Balcon said he envisioned Veidt as the lead in a proposed Gaumont film that was soon to be cast and scripted, namely *Rome Express*. Balcon and Veidt agreed on mutually satisfactory terms and the contract was signed. Both Balcon and Veidt were to look back on this meeting, years later, as a happy and successful cooperative venture that produced several memorable films.

Just before leaving Germany, Conrad had gone to the residence on Kaiserdamm Street to see Viola and they said their sad goodbyes. This was very painful for both of them. From England, Conrad would send letters and postcards to Viola in Berlin almost every day, with occasional phone calls also. Conrad would often close the letters with "I love you. Your daddy. P.S. Please be good to Mother."

So instead of bowing to the Nazis, and submitting to the pressure they were exerting on him, Veidt chose exile from Germany to England. Conrad and Lily found a very nice home in Hampstead, in northwest London. It was pleasant and comfortable, made of red brick, with a small





The 1933 British mystery tale *Rome Express* was a fascinating forerunner of many later classic train thrillers. Veidt (right) was cast as Zurta, the master-criminal who murders one of his accomplices on the train, and later dies himself as he jumps off the speeding Paris-to-Rome train. Eliot Makeham (left) and Cedric Hardwicke (center) also were featured in important roles.

courtyard in the front and a large fireplace in the parlor area, usually with a bright, cheery fire blazing away; and with attractive shrubbery and vines around the outside of the house, and a large oak tree in the yard. Not a mansion by any means, but a very nice and pleasant home. Another advantage of this residence was its location—it wasn't far from the Denham film studios where Conrad would later star in British films.

After emigrating to England, Conrad almost immediately felt that he belonged there. He experienced a sense of being at home. He and Lily were very happy there.

Another actor who chose exile from Hitler's Germany was the venerable Albert Bassermann, Veidt's idol from the early Reinhardt theater days. Just as in Veidt's case, Bassermann, though not Jewish himself, was married to a Jewish lady, his beloved Elsa. He refused to divorce her and chose exile instead. Germany's loss was America's gain because Bassermann came to America and took part in several fine films, contributing his acting expertise to the American film industry.

Soon after settling in England, Veidt was overjoyed when he began receiving cordial invitations and offers from the British film industry to work in several films. From 1933 on, Veidt began to consider England his home rather than Germany, and a few years later, in 1939, he received his British citizenship.

Before fully settling down in England there was one business matter in Austria that Conrad wasn't able to complete before leaving Germany. So in the spring of 1933, Conrad and Lily left London for a combined business and pleasure trip to Austria. They traveled first to Vienna where Conrad met with the director of the Volkstheater. This was in regard to a possible guest appearance for Conrad at that large and renowned theater. After the successful completion of negotiations for that stage appearance, Conrad and Lily departed Vienna for the pristine loveliness of the little town of Velden in the Austrian Alps. Conrad and Lily stayed at an enchanting villa on the shore of beautiful Lake Wörther in the province of Carinthia.

There they spent a brief but highly enjoyable holiday period exploring that scenic region. They took long walks together. They went for boat rides on the calm, blue waters of the lake. They went horseback riding on the forest trails. They enjoyed the absence of large crowds of people as in London and Vienna, and reveled in the pleasure of just being alone with each other. In the evening Conrad and Lily went to a local "gasthaus" (a combination of inn, restaurant, and pub) where they dined. They also enjoyed the music of a small Austrian orchestra that was playing sentimental favorite songs of the period. Conrad marveled at the happiness he had found with his new bride. Not only was Lily a lovely woman but she possessed a warm and charming personality and an understanding nature. Conrad found himself telling Lily his thoughts, and sharing his hopes and dreams with her.

Their idyllic and romantic five-day vacation ended all too soon, and Conrad and Lily departed from their Alpine retreat and returned to the bustling crowds and the rigidly scheduled life of London.

In May, 1933, Conrad wrote to Viola, inviting her to come, with her mother's permission, for a visit in France with him and to meet his new wife. Viola was so thrilled at the prospect of seeing her dear father again that she could hardly wait. As soon as school was over, and the summer vacation began, Viola (and her governess, Fraulein Klein) departed Berlin on the famous Orient Express. The cars on this train were outfitted with

red plush fabric seats with antimacassars on the seat backs, decorative gilded angels throughout the train, and ornate chamberpots that came out from under the washbasin in the lavatory! The first stop was at Milan, Italy, where there was a two-hour wait. During this time Viola's car was disconnected and then hooked up to another train that was destined for Nice, France, while the remainder of the train, the Orient Express, went on to Istanbul, Turkey.

Conrad met the train at the Nice station, with a limousine and a liveried chauffeur. Viola considered herself to be the happiest child in the world to be with her father once more. They then drove from Nice, past St. Maxim, and on to the Golf Hotel, high on a hill in Beauvallon. Viola and her governess were quartered in one suite and Conrad and Lily had an adjoining suite. This is how Viola described the meeting with her new stepmother: "Daddy then took me to his suite and introduced me to his new wife. He said simply, 'Fuchsi, this is Lily.' Lily was tall, slim, with lovely gray eyes, a warm smile, and a delightful Hungarian accent. I liked



Conrad and Lily are seen here, holding their Sealyham terrier, Mackie, at the front door of their home near Hampstead Heath, England, in the late 1930s.

her immediately because, for one thing, she did not clutch me to her bosom like so many other women in love with Daddy did. Lily seemed relaxed and poised. I think Daddy was more ill at ease than Lily or I." After they left their suites and descended the staircase to the dining room, Viola held her father's hand with one hand, and then reached out and took Lily's hand in her other hand. As they entered the dining room a bond had been formed and they soon became a close and loving family. The next day, all three got up early and went to the beach. They walked along the shore, chatting animatedly. Later in the day, Viola learned how to swim, in the hotel pool, with a vigilant and somewhat worried Conrad watching the proceedings. He observed closely as the swimming instructor gave orders and suggestions to Viola, who had a rope attached to her body for safety during the swimming lessons.

During the period that the Veidt family was staying at the Golf Hotel in Beauvallon, there occurred one night the "incident of the dreaded bat." It must have been about two o'clock in the morning. All the guests were in their rooms. Everything was quiet and peaceful. Suddenly, pandemonium erupted. Bells were ringing; shouts were heard and bell-boys ran through the hotel corridors. Upon being awakened by the noise, Viola came out of her room to see what was happening. There in the hallway she saw her respected and normally very dignified father, in his pajamas, holding a magazine over his head while he was running towards her. Over Herr Veidt's head a small bat was fluttering wildly about. Veidt was excitedly screaming: "Get that thing away from me. It's going to land on my hair. I'm starting a movie soon. They'll have to shave me!"

One would think that Dracula and his entire horde of vampires, wolves, and bats was after Conrad! Soon, however, Conrad ran into Viola's room and closed the door hurriedly. The inoffensive little bat, probably as frightened by all the noise and commotion as Conrad was by it, was quickly ushered by the hotel staff out of the hotel in the same way it had apparently entered it—through an open window. Soon peace and serenity descended once more on the other guests of the hotel.

Peace and serenity were not to be had just then by Conrad, however. As if that incident hadn't been enough excitement and exasperation for one night, Conrad was involved in another problem immediately thereafter. I should mention that Viola's governess, *Fräulein Klein*, was an attractive lady in her early thirties, with blond hair and blue eyes. I should also mention that the manager of the hotel, a *Monsieur Romain*, was a handsome

Frenchman of the Charles Boyer type. Monsieur Romain had met the Veidt family on their arrival at the hotel on the first day. At that time he had noticed, and taken an immediate liking to, Viola's governess, Fräulein Klein. On those frequent days when Viola was busy sightseeing and shopping and visiting the beach with her family, Fräulein Klein was free to date Mr. Romain and did so quite often.

On the night of the bat invasion, Conrad ran out into the corridor and hurried to Viola's room for refuge, slamming the door behind him. At this moment, as Conrad and Viola watched with open-mouthed surprise, out of Fräulein Klein's bed came a very disheveled, very embarrassed, and partially clad pair: Fräulein Klein and Monsieur Romain! Herr Veidt lost his usual cool poise and angrily berated the two lovers. He told Fräulein Klein that she was fired and advised Monsieur Romain that he too would be punished. (Viola told me recently that these liaisons had probably been going on for almost a week but that she had never heard anything at night. Viola also told me that she has always been a deep sleeper!)

Conrad preferred not to dwell on the subject of the bat at breakfast later that morning!

Conrad had about a week left to spend there in France before returning to London to start shooting on his new motion picture. During the remaining days, Conrad managed to play a great deal of golf. Viola often tagged along with him, enjoying every moment. Viola would sometimes applaud her father's skillful drives and putts, and sometimes tease him gently about other shots that missed the cup or the green completely. On other days the three of them, Conrad, Lily, and Viola, would go sightseeing in the nearby towns along the French Riviera, as well as shopping in the smart shops in the area. Then in the evenings, Conrad and Lily would go out to a cabaret for some dining, dancing, and entertainment. At the end of that wonderful week, after a tearful parting, Conrad and Lily returned to London and Viola and her governess returned to Berlin.

One of the best films of 1933 was the exciting Gaumont-British film, *Rome Express*, produced by Michael Balcon and directed by Walter Forde. This was the first film made at the re-built Shepherd's Bush studios in England. This excellent mystery was set on the Paris-Rome express train, and the plot concerned theft, blackmail, murder, and love among the assorted characters featured as passengers aboard the train.

This was the forerunner for many classic train thrillers, such as *The*

*Lady Vanishes*, and *Murder on the Orient Express*, and numerous other similar photoplays. The film *Rome Express* boasted a taut screenplay and deft directorial control by Walter Forde. Veidt was cast as the master-criminal, Zurta, who murders one of his former criminal accomplices on the train, and then later dies himself as he jumps from the speeding train.

On the Gaumont-British studio grounds at Shepherd's Bush, G-B technicians and carpenters had constructed a remarkable facsimile, in miniature, of the real Rome Express train. This was an exact likeness of the original train, down to the interiors of the cars. It also came complete with railroad tracks as well as exterior background buildings and scenery along the tracks.

Often important personages would come to the studio to visit the movie set and watch some of the filming. On one such occasion a member of the Austrian royal house, the Princess Marie Louise and her entourage, visited the set. The princess expressed a desire to see the miniature Rome Express and to meet the film's director and cast.

On being presented to the Hapsburg princess, Conrad clicked his heels together in the Teutonic military manner, and bowed and kissed the princess' extended hand. After meeting the other cast members, and Walter Forde, the director, the princess was given a tour of the set and of the miniature Rome Express. Upon leaving the set, the princess stated that she was greatly impressed with the highly detailed work done by the studio to replicate the original Rome Express train (which she had ridden in the past) and she was delighted with the opportunity to view the cast members, director, and film crew in action as they filmed scenes of the movie. The princess also confided that she was particularly impressed by the appearance and charm of the handsome leading man, Herr Veidt. She requested an autographed photo of him be sent to her, to which the studio public relations head agreed.

One of Veidt's lines in this film was a rather clever bit of script-writing. In the scene where Veidt, as Zurta, has just killed a man, his confederate berates him about the deed, saying: "Why did you kill him? You must be mad!" Veidt's reply, given with his usual cool aplomb, was: "No, just annoyed!"

Veidt's able co-stars were Esther Ralston, Cedric Hardwicke, Frank Vosper, Gordon Harker, and Donald Calthrop. This motion picture was highly successful wherever exhibited, and was said to be the best British film up to that time. It also received the coveted National Board of Review Award as one of the best films of 1933, worldwide.

It was during the filming of *Rome Express* that two separate accidents occurred to Conrad. The first took place as Conrad was driving his car from his home to the studio. As he neared the studio gates, Conrad noticed a man riding a motorcycle at a high rate of speed and heading in Conrad's direction. Before Conrad could take any evasive action, the motorcycle crashed into Conrad's car. Conrad was unhurt but the motorcyclist was seriously injured. Conrad immediately ran to the injured man and helped him to the best of his ability, until he could be taken to a hospital by ambulance.

The second accident occurred shortly after the motorcycle crash. Conrad had gone to the set for his role as Zurta. In this scene Conrad was to leap aboard a "moving train." The "train" was actually only an imitation. In reality, it was only a large wall that was painted, fitted with windows, and which looked just like a real railroad passenger car. In order to make his hurried boarding appear more convincing, Conrad took a short run and then jumped "aboard." As he jumped, however, he inadvertently caught his little finger in one of the "carriage" handles, which bent his little finger almost in two. As Conrad was suffering intense pain, the director ordered an X-ray to be taken of Conrad's hand. It was then determined that Conrad's finger was broken. After medical treatment, Conrad returned to the studio. Although the injury was extremely painful, it did not prevent Conrad from completing his acting assignment in this film. Conrad wouldn't permit these two contretemps to upset him or deter his dedication to the completion of the film.

Another fine thriller from Gaumont-British in 1933 was the gripping *I Was A Spy*. This motion picture boasted an introduction by Winston Churchill, who at that time was the British Secretary of State. Mr. Churchill, in his brief remarks, stated that the film was based on fact, not fiction. Victor Saville directed this spy melodrama with a masterly touch and excellent pace. The location and setting of the film was Belgium in 1914, during the early days of World War I. A Belgian nurse (played by the beautiful Madeleine Carroll) is trained to become a spy. She becomes involved with a German spy ring through a German orderly she knows (played by Herbert Marshall). The German orderly is plotting against the German commanding officer (Veidt). The nurse/spy accomplishes a great deal for the Allied cause by spying for the British and by acts of sabotage against the Germans. The film was based on the true story of Marthe Knockaert McKenna, whose exploits in the field of espionage were docu-



Scenes from the exciting film *I Was a Spy*. ABOVE: The German commandant (Veidt) has called the brave Belgian nurse (Madeleine Carroll) into his office for questioning as he suspects her of being a spy for the Allies. BELOW: They share a brief interlude of romance.





mented in her memoirs and in official military reports of the period. Just one of the many secrets obtained from the Germans by this clever and daring spy was Germany's intention to introduce poison gas into World War I warfare.

The rest of the extraordinary cast included Donald Calthrop (a notorious scene-stealer was Mr. Calthrop!), Martita Hunt, Nigel Bruce, and Edmund Gwenn—a top-notch cast of actors by any standard. A leading British periodical of the day, the *Film Weekly*, named *I Was A Spy* as the "Best Film of the Year." Another British periodical, *The Observer*, characterized this unusually well-made film as "a war film without vituperation ... moving and pitiful."

While working on *I Was A Spy*, Conrad and Lily had invited the director, Victor Saville, over to their home in Hampstead one evening for supper. After finishing the delicious meal that Lily had prepared, they were sitting in the living room, discussing the progress of the current film, when the phone rang. Veidt picked up the phone and was surprised, but not pleased, to learn that the caller was Reichsminister Joseph Goebbels himself, calling from Berlin. Goebbels attempted to convince Veidt that he was needed in Germany, and promised him that he would be given the finest roles if he returned home. He also promised to bestow on Veidt the honorary title "Artist of the State." Veidt refused, knowing that neither he nor his wife would be safe or comfortable in Germany under the Nazi rule.

After the release of the film *I Was A Spy*, the German Embassy in London sent an official written protest to both the British Foreign Office and the Gaumont-British studios. It seems the German government took offense at Veidt's characterization of a German officer who is duped by a British female spy. The British government, the producer, the director of the film at the Gaumont studios, and Veidt himself all shrugged off the complaint. Their collective reply to the German ambassador was that screenplays and actors' performances in British films were not subject to German approval or influence!

# 18

## A Prisoner of the Third Reich

WHILE WORKING ON LOCATION in Germany in late 1933 and early 1934, on the remake of the film *William Tell*, Conrad received a motion picture offer which was very attractive to him, both artistically and monetarily. The call was from England, from the head of Gaumont-British film studios, seeking Veidt for the leading role in their projected cinemation of the Lion Feuchtwanger best-selling novel, *Jew Süss*. Veidt had met Feuchtwanger a few years earlier in Germany, at a party, and they became good friends after that. Conrad had read Feuchtwanger's novel *Jew Süss* and was impressed with the quality of the writing as well as the power of the story itself. Veidt and Feuchtwanger, after many discussions in the course of their growing friendship, found that they both agreed on the pressing danger of the growing Nazi movement in Germany. Then, after January 1933, when the Nazis gained control, Veidt and Feuchtwanger's concern for Germany increased immeasurably. Feuchtwanger, because he was Jewish, and because he had written such a powerful attack on anti-Semitism and on the Nazi movement, was forced to flee Germany for France, and later came to America in 1940.

So when Gaumont-British Films offered him the leading role in this outstanding production, Conrad accepted with alacrity. The part was an acting plum, coveted by any serious dramatic actor. Conrad advised Gaumont-British that he would be returning home to England soon, upon completion of his current role as Gessler in the Terra-Films production of *William Tell*. That was the last the Gaumont-British studio was to hear from Veidt for some time.

In the meantime, Reichsminister Joseph Goebbels in the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda had learned of Veidt's acceptance of the part in the film *Jew Süss*, and had become highly incensed. He felt that Veidt, by portraying the sympathetic role of Süss in the story of oppressed Jews



The 1933 Gaumont-British film *I Was A Spy* starred Veidt as the German commandant. This absorbing espionage drama, based on a true story, concerned a Belgian nurse who served as a spy for the Allies in World War I.

in Germany of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, would be drawing unwanted attention to the plight of Jews in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany under the Nazi regime. The Nazis also felt that Veidt was betraying his homeland by showing the Germans in a bad light, and by portraying the Jewish people in a sympathetic manner. They felt Veidt was anti-German which, of course, he wasn't at all—he was only anti-Nazi.

The reason the Gaumont-British studios didn't hear further from

Conrad, as promised, was that soon after this he received a visit from the local Nazi gauleiter (district leader) for the region of Bavaria where the *William Tell* film was being shot. The local representative had been sent to the location site with a message for Conrad from Reichsminister Goebbels. He advised Conrad that the Führer, Adolf Hitler, was greatly displeased with Veidt's acceptance of the role in *Jew Süss* and wished him to turn down the role "for the sake of the Fatherland." The discussion became quite heated, after Conrad's refusal to decline the role. The gauleiter then left the area in a rage. He returned to the film location site the next day, however, accompanied by two security policemen. He relayed to Conrad an ultimatum from Minister Joseph Goebbels, demanding that Conrad immediately notify the British company that he was rejecting the film offer.

When Conrad steadfastly refused to do so, he was summarily taken into custody by the security police and transported to the nearby town. On arrival in town, Conrad was taken to a rather seedy old hotel located not far from the Nazi headquarters building. There he was given a room and became a "guest of the state." Although not charged with any specific crime, Conrad was, for all practical purposes, a political prisoner. He was being held incommunicado by his captors. Conrad had a small bedroom and a bath. At the only exit, the front door, a very large and very unfriendly SS-uniformed man stood guard. The single window of his room had iron bars on the outside of the frame.

Conrad was not permitted to have any visitors nor was he allowed to make any telephone calls to relatives or friends. His request to talk to a lawyer was denied. He was permitted to write one letter, a letter to his employer in England, the Gaumont-British studios.

Back in England, Lily was worried sick because she had heard nothing from Conrad. She was becoming frantic, fearing that something terrible had happened to her husband. Lily contacted the Gaumont-British executives and implored them to try to ascertain what had happened to delay Conrad's return to England. Conrad had left England specifically for the location shooting in Germany of the *William Tell* film, and was to return to England immediately thereafter.

As a matter of fact the producers at Gaumont-British studios were quite worried themselves, even before Lily Veidt had contacted them, when Conrad had failed to arrive home in time to be briefed on his new film in accordance with his contract with the studio.



In 1934, the British film *Jew Süss* was released. Veidt gave a marvelous performance in the title role of a Jewish man in 18th Century Germany who yearns for wealth and power in order to help free his own people from the German oppression. Benita Hume (right) was excellent as the Duchess Marie. This film angered the Nazi regime in Germany and they made a formal protest to the British Foreign Office. Their protest was rejected by the British and the film was exhibited as scheduled.

In reply to the studios' urgent inquiry to the German authorities, a phone call was received from a minor Nazi ministry bureaucrat, advising that Conrad was ill and was unable to travel.

Next the studio received the one letter that Veidt was permitted to write. It was a strange letter. Although in Conrad's handwriting, it was obvious to all that the content of the letter had been dictated to him. The wording was much too stilted and formal, not at all like Conrad's normally warm and effusive letters. The envelope also contained a separate certificate from a German doctor, stating that "Herr Veidt was too ill to work or to travel and that his return to England would be delayed indefinitely."

At this time Michael Balcon, who was not only the producer of Veidt's last film (*I Was A Spy*) and of the projected production of *Jew Süss*, but was a good friend of Conrad and Lily, decided to verify Conrad's medical condition. Balcon contacted a very respected British doctor and asked him

if he would go to Germany and examine Veidt and advise as to his health. The doctor agreed to do so. But it took many diplomatic communications back and forth from the British Foreign Office and the German government before this was permitted.

Eventually the doctor did go to Germany and examined Veidt and found him to be in excellent health and completely fit to travel.

It was obvious that the German claim that Veidt was sick was patently false. The real reason for Veidt's involuntary detention in Germany was the Nazi sensitivity to world opinion. They were afraid that the release of *Jew Süss* would clearly show the marked resemblance of the German oppression of Jewish citizens of Germany over the centuries.

During his imprisonment in his little room in Bavaria, Conrad was telling himself that he must be strong and not give in or collaborate with the Nazis. Although Veidt was not physically abused during his captivity, there was always the implied threat of such violence hanging over him. In addition, he was subjected to a constant stream of verbal abuse from the Nazi gauleiter and his staff of sadistic guards. He was called a "traitor to the Fatherland," a "communist," a "Jew-lover," a "British spy," and many unprintable epithets.

On several occasions Conrad was taken out of his room and escorted to a large office where the gauleiter sat behind a massive desk. The room had the requisite accouterments for a German office of the 1930s: a huge portrait of a grim-faced Adolf Hitler and many swastika-ed flags and banners in red, white, and black on the walls.

There the ritual was basically the same each time. The gauleiter greeted Conrad with the standard Nazi hand salute and a shouted "Heil Hitler." Conrad refused to match the Nazi salute and answered something non-committal, such as "Guten Morgen." The gauleiter would then inquire politely of Conrad's health and ask if Conrad's accommodations were satisfactory. After this small talk, the gauleiter then interrogated Conrad as to his friends and business associates inside Germany. He asked for their names and addresses, which Conrad declined to furnish.

At this point the gauleiter would stand up and ask Conrad if he had changed his mind about the proposed British film that was objectionable to the Führer. When Conrad would reply that he had not, the gauleiter would become furious and shout for the guards to return Conrad to his room.

This same routine was followed at each successive interrogation, with

essentially the same inquiries by the *gauleiter*, and with the same replies by Conrad. These interrogations were conducted at all hours of the day and night, especially at times when Conrad had been trying to rest. Frequently, Conrad was deliberately awakened from his slumber at two a.m. to be brought to the *gauleiter's* office. At this time he was asked the same questions he had refused to answer only a few hours earlier. Apparently, the Nazis hoped to break Conrad's spirit by these constant interruptions and coercive interrogations, and by depriving Conrad of his sleep. The Nazis hoped that Conrad's will to resist would be weakened by the threats and that in time he would submit to Nazi demands.

Considerable pressure in the form of mental coercion and threats was brought to bear on Conrad by his captors during this very trying period, but Conrad refused to capitulate and never collaborated with the Nazis.

So it was that Conrad was absolutely overjoyed at the unexpected arrival of the British doctor who had come from London to examine him. This was the first (and only) visitor that Veidt had received during his incarceration, and Conrad was starved for news about his wife, about the G-B studio, and about the outside world in general. He was ecstatic just to hear a friendly voice once more. Conrad told the doctor to tell Lily that he was well and that he sends his love to her.

Aside from the long-term benefit of the doctor's visit (it helped greatly in the successful negotiations for Conrad's release), the immediate benefit was that it helped Conrad recover from the deep depression he felt. The solitary confinement, the constant threats and coercion from the Nazis, and the complete lack of news from his family, his friends, and business associates was having a detrimental effect on him. The harrowing experience Conrad endured as a political prisoner would probably have broken many a lesser man. But Conrad had the physical and moral courage to resist all the Nazi pressure and threats.

After the visit with the doctor, Conrad felt that he had not been forgotten and he returned to his old self, with more confidence and hope of his eventual release.

It then took the combined efforts of the Gaumont-British firm and the British Foreign Office to obtain Veidt's release from his detention in Germany. The German government was unwilling to provoke a major international incident over Conrad's stubborn independence. Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop advised the Führer that it would be in the best interests of Germany's standing in the world of nations to release

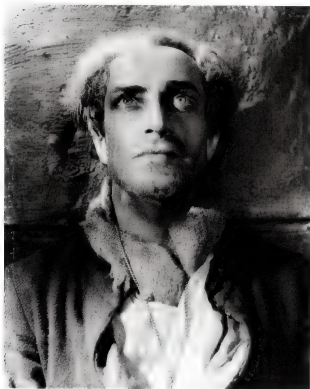
Veidt at once. This was done and Conrad was given transportation and the necessary documents to permit him to leave Germany. Two days later Conrad was reunited with Lily in their home in London and the nightmare came to an end.

After this terrible ordeal was over, and Conrad was back at work in England, his last made-in-Germany film *William Tell* was released in Germany and was a big hit wherever shown. Although Conrad had been gone from Germany for almost a year when this film was first shown in a large Berlin theater on January 12, 1934, the audience applauded loudly at Veidt's appearance in the film and his performance therein. Even though he portrayed the villain, Gessler, he was still appreciated by the audience for his acting skill and his personal charisma. The vilification of Veidt by the Nazi media had not affected his standing with German audiences; neither had his detention by the Nazis. Veidt's stubborn refusal to submit to Nazi pressure seemed to increase his popularity with the German movie-goers. Even though Conrad had left Germany in protest against the Nazis, he was still widely adored and respected by the German people.

Aside from fostering a warm reception for Veidt *personally* among the German audiences, *William Tell* was a third-rate film. This was due primarily to the irritatingly slow pace of the screenplay and the inept direction of Heinz Paul.

Meanwhile, the German government was exerting as much diplomatic pressure as possible on the Gaumont-British company and on the British Foreign Office to ban the exhibition of the film *Jew Süss*. To offset this German pressure, Michael Balcon traveled to America to request the assistance of the distinguished scientist, Albert Einstein. On arrival at Princeton University, Balcon met with Professor Einstein and asked him if he would support an appeal calling for the showing of the film, despite the Nazi government's opposition. Einstein signed the appeal petition eagerly and Balcon returned to England, reinforced in his determination not to bow to Nazi pressure. Einstein was universally known and respected for his scientific accomplishments and his humanitarian, non-political views. Professor Einstein's endorsement of the appeal would carry a lot of weight with millions of people the world over, including world leaders.





Veidt is shown here in a scene from the epic film *Jew Süss* in which Süss contemplates the death that awaits him on the gallows.

# 19

## A Procession of Fine British Films

**B**EFORE DESCRIBING MORE of Veidt's films from his "British Period," let me interject a brief note. Recently Viola Veidt told me that in 1933, while living in Berlin at their residence at Kaiserdamm 82, she and her mother, Felicitas, noticed that Hermann Goering with his family and extensive entourage, including the Marshal's pet lion, had moved into the large building across the street from the Veidt residence. Viola was quite amused one day soon thereafter when she saw the Goering pet lion come out onto the balcony, stand up on his hind legs to peer over, with his front paws resting on the balcony railing, and then bump several large flower pots that were on the balcony ledge. The heavy flower pots fell from there onto the heads of two armed SS soldiers on guard below!

In 1934, Conrad undertook the title role in the remarkable film *Jew Süss*, which was based on the famous story by Lion Feuchtwanger. Incidentally, *Jew Süss* was one of the costliest films ever produced in England up to that time. This film infuriated the Nazis and they tried desperately to have it banned, but this was in vain. They put considerable diplomatic pressure on the British government to stop the distribution and exhibition of this film but this was refused outright and exhibition of the controversial film proceeded on schedule. The film's plot concerns the life of one man in 18th Century Germany, a Jew named Josef Süss (Veidt) who gains a great deal of power and wishes to help the Jewish people of Würtemberg. But he is prevented from doing so by the oppression and persecution of the Jewish people by the Germans. Veidt's brilliant portrayal added much to this powerful historical drama. Lothar Mendes directed this film with considerable éclat.

The original casting plan was to have Emil Jannings and Elizabeth Bergner co-star with Veidt in this superb production. Later it was decided

that the additional high salaries that Jannings and Bergner would command would bring the already high cost of the film to an impossible level. Added to this was the fact that Bergner and Jannings were under contract to other film companies and were both busy with other film commitments. The final, and perhaps overriding, argument against casting Jannings in this film was his newly-admitted sympathy for, and collaboration with, the Nazi regime.



Conrad Veidt in a scene from the remarkable film *Jew Süss*.

The excellent cast that was finally chosen for this fascinating motion picture included Frank Vosper, Cedric Hardwicke, Benita Hume, Gerald du Maurier and Paul Graetz.

The film describes the extravagances of the titled nobility and contrasts that idle, privileged, luxurious, pampered life with the grinding poverty, oppression, and prejudicial treatment suffered by the Jewish residents of



Another scene from the powerful drama *Jew Süss* shows Veidt with British actress Joan Maude as Magdalene, the woman Süss is strongly attracted to but loses.

the Würtemberg ghetto. The climax of the film, the gallows scene, shows Süss being hanged high above the ground in the iron cage in one of the most moving and dramatic scenes ever achieved in cinema.

Shortly before his execution, Süss learns the startling fact that he is half Christian and half Jewish. But he refuses to announce this publicly. He prefers to remain a Jew in the eyes of his enemies and he proceeds to his death by hanging, as a Jew.



Conrad is seen here with British actress Leonora Corbett, who was visiting him on the set of his current film in 1935, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. At the time Miss Corbett was working on a nearby set of the same studio, on a different film. Conrad is describing some of the action and the plot of a scene being filmed in this allegorical tale.



In 1934, the British film *Bella Donna* was released. Veidt was cast as the rascally Egyptian, Mahmoud Baroudi, in the romantic triangle story. Mary Ellis (left) plays the role of a woman who attempts to poison her husband so she can be with her new lover, Baroudi.

After their failure to dissuade Veidt from starring in *Jew Süss* (even after holding him a prisoner) and their failure to have the film banned by the British government, the Nazis, in retaliation, then placed Veidt's name and that of his family on their restricted lists in Germany. Veidt was forbidden to ever return to Germany again. The Nazis also banned the showing of any of Veidt's films in Germany from that date on.

Another contributing factor to Veidt's persona non grata status with the Nazis was the fact that he had once told Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels that he, Veidt, would be willing to hire Goebbels as a set designer or a publicity agent because of the terrific job of staging Goebbels had done on Adolf Hitler as the Führer's campaign manager before the elections of 1932 and 1933! This intended humorous slur and ridicule, of course, did not endear Veidt to the Nazis, and only served to increase their growing animosity toward him.

In addition to their opposition to his current role in *Jew Süss*, the Nazis vehemently resented the viewpoints espoused in two of Veidt's earlier films. One was *Anders als die Andern*, the 1919 film which was sym-

pathetic to the plight of homosexuals in Germany and called for the abolition of discriminatory laws against them. The other Veidt film that upset the Nazis was the 1931 anti-war film *Die Andere Seite*. The Nazis apparently couldn't tolerate either homosexuals or pacifists in their "New Order."

Another British film released in 1934 was the Olympic Films drama entitled *Bella Donna*. This study of an unhappy marriage and a woman's affair with a handsome stranger starred Veidt as the sinister Egyptian, Mahmoud Baroudi, and beautiful Mary Ellis as the wife. The other important roles were capably handled by Cedric Hardwicke, John Stuart, and Jeanne Stuart. The film was a model of British restraint and understatement. It concerned an alluring woman who, tired of her marriage, attempts to poison her husband in order to be with her new lover, Baroudi (Veidt). However, her plot is discovered in time by her husband's best friend (Hardwicke). The wife is then tossed contemptuously aside by both her husband and her erstwhile lover. Unfortunately, the screenplay was rather weak, and the direction by



In the 1935 fantasy *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, Veidt (center) portrays a mystical saintly stranger who comes to a London boarding house and helps the lodgers there with their problems. Frank Cellier (left) and Rene Ray (right) have important roles in this memorable film.

Robert Milton was noticeably uneven. Veidt and Hardwicke, however, gave extraordinary performances as Baroudi and the husband's best friend, respectively. The film was based on the famous novel of the same name by Robert Hichens.

Several fine motion picture roles were completed by Veidt in England, including one of his own favorites, namely, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. This was taken from the engrossing and best-selling novel by J.K. Jerome. Veidt's sensitive and moving performance as the saintly Stranger, who tries to help the residents of the seedy boarding house, was truly memorable. This Gaumont-British film is a beautiful and appealing story of the struggle between Good and Evil. The scene is a Bloomsbury boarding house and Evil is represented by the hard-hearted slum landlord (Frank Cellier) and Good is represented by the Christ-like Stranger (Veidt). Veidt's acting is impressive and sincere. Veidt's expert delineation of the central character of the story added much to the final success of the film.

Veidt portrayed the stranger who enters the boarding house and by his deep understanding helps to bring peace and contentment into the lives of the boarders. There is an excellent cross-section of people represented by the boarders, and the result is a gripping drama. Berthold Viertel



Veidt is flanked by Frank Cellier (as the evil slum landlord) and Rene Ray (as the overworked housemaid) in this scene from the morality play *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. Veidt, Cellier and Ray headed a fine ensemble of talented actors.





A tense moment in the allegorical fantasy *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, with Veidt (center) as the saintly stranger who is trying to help the servant (center foreground). The other residents of the seedy boarding house look on with disbelieving glances.

directed this wonderful motion picture with a deft touch. Featured in this film along with Veidt and Cellier were Anna Lee, Rene Ray (a newcomer to films who gave a marvelous performance as the little servant girl) and Sara Allgood in important roles. All were superb.

This allegorical tale managed to blend impressive acting by Veidt and the other cast members with first-rate direction by Viertel. The screenplay, written by Michael Hogan and Alma Reville (Mrs. Alfred Hitchcock) is an expert adaptation of the author's original allegorical story.

Some time after the release of this motion picture Conrad told friends and associates that the part of the saintly Stranger in *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* was his most difficult and challenging role. The actor portraying the Stranger would need to convey a highly spiritual essence. Conrad's charismatic appeal is very evident in this filmed morality play. One film review of that period stated that "Veidt absolutely radiates

spirituality in this film!" Another British film review of 1935 commented favorably about this film, stating: "There is a beauty and simplicity in the story that seems out of place among the synthetic glamour of the usual run of cinema fare."

After *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* had been exhibited for several weeks the Gaumont studio and cast members began to receive a tremendous amount of fan mail. Conrad said: "This film has brought me the greatest fan mail I have ever received." By that he meant that the fan mail was great not only in quantity but that the messages imparted in the letters were so sincere and moving. For example, many of the writers of these letters stated that seeing Veidt's performance in that film had helped them greatly in their private lives. One letter-writer wrote: "You have made life worthwhile for me again!" Another fan wrote: "Thank you for your marvelous performance, Mr. Veidt. You have renewed my faith." Conrad said that he had never received fan mail that moved him so emotionally.

In addition to the usual type of fan mail for the cast members, the studio also received a great deal of acclaim from the Church of England. Clergymen wrote letters to the newspapers, praising the film and urging people to see it. This was a highly unusual action by members of the clergy.

Conrad and Lily often visited the home of director Berthold Viertel and his attractive wife, Salka. Wherever they lived in their frequent travels throughout Europe and America (Berlin, Vienna, Munich, Prague, London, New York, Hollywood, etc.) the Viertel home was a center for the arts. Actors, musicians, artists, and writers seemed to gravitate there, gathering for good food and stimulating conversation and discussions about the arts. Salka Viertel, an accomplished actress and screenwriter in her own right, once described Veidt as being "a most handsome and darling man."<sup>1</sup>

Since coming to England in April, 1933, Conrad had appeared in five British films by the time 1934 came to a close. Conrad was delighted, as was Lily, to learn that in 1934 the influential British periodical *Picturegoer Magazine* had formally named Conrad Veidt as "the best British actor." Conrad not only was pleased by the award itself, but also by this indication that the British film industry and the British filmgoers had accepted him as one of their own.

1. *The Kindness of Strangers*, by Salka Viertel. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969.

In 1935, Conrad was aware that Lily was becoming increasingly concerned and worried about her parents, Eugen Barta and Hermine Rosenberg Barta, who were living in Vienna. Although Austria wasn't annexed by Germany until March, 1938, a virulent anti-Semitism was already prevalent in Austria. This irrational prejudice was spawned and fanned into a hysterical white heat by the speeches and writings of Nazis such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, and Julius Streicher. Streicher was the rabidly anti-Semitic publisher of the newspaper *Der Stürmer*. The Nazis' psychopathic hatred of the Jewish people was spreading throughout all areas of Nazi Europe like a malignant cancer. As a result Lily was frantic with worry about her parents' safety, with good reason.

Conrad was equally cognizant of the dangerous position Lily's parents were in and decided to do something about it. In the next few weeks, Conrad made all the necessary arrangements, which included the payment of bribes to venal border guards. Guided by one of Conrad's trusted



A Gaumont-British technician applies facial make-up to Conrad on the set during filming of *King of the Damned* in 1936.

friends, the Bartas crossed the Swiss-Austrian border at night near Feldkirch, Austria. Another of Conrad's friends met the couple there, with a vehicle, and drove them to Zurich, Switzerland. Conrad met the refugee couple in Zurich and personally escorted them to the very comfortable apartment he had rented for them in a nice neighborhood of Zurich. Although Veidt was persona non grata in Germany and Austria, and restricted from entry therein, he was welcome in neutral Switzerland. Switzerland was a safe haven for many of Germany's displaced persons during the 1930s and 1940s. It was directly due to Conrad's intercession that Lily's parents escaped the holocaust that was engulfing European Jewry.

In 1936, Gaumont-British Films released an excellent drama, *King of the Damned*, based on the fine play by John Chancellor. It concerns a Devils' Island type of penal colony somewhere in the Caribbean. Veidt



Conrad is shown here studying his lines for his role in the exciting film *King of the Damned*. The bungalow was built especially for Conrad for the location filming.

starred as Convict 83, the leader of the prisoners. The lovely Helen Vinson played the role of Anna, the daughter of the prison commandant, and Noah Beery and Cecil Ramage had important roles as a prisoner and a guard, respectively. The story builds exciting suspense as the prisoners revolt against the corrupt and cruel guards and the intolerable conditions of the prison. Walter Forde handled the directorial duties with a marked flair.

In 1937, Veidt was offered the coveted role of Gil de Berault in the British production of *Under the Red Robe*, which co-starred Annabella and Raymond Massey, and which was directed by the great Swedish actor/director, Victor Seastrom. It was released by 20th Century-Fox and produced in the Denham studios in England. Veidt plays the swash-buckling adventurer, Gil de Berault, who had been arrested for dueling and is under sentence of death. At the last moment, as de Berault is ascending the steps to the scaffold, he is given a reprieve by Cardinal Richelieu (Raymond Massey) on the condition that he capture the rebel Huguenot leader, the Duke de Foix.



The British film *King of the Damned*, released in 1936, featured Veidt (extreme left) as Convict 83. Helen Vinson (left) played the prison commandant's daughter who loves Convict 83 in this story of prisoners in a Caribbean penal colony. Noah Beery (extreme right) was also co-starred in this fascinating film.

De Berault, known as "The Black Death" due to his skill as a swordsman, travels to the rebel Duke's castle, which he enters by means of a ruse. There he falls in love with the Duke's beautiful sister, Marguerite (Annabella). This causes de Berault to be torn between his love for Marguerite and his feelings of duty to Richelieu to capture her brother. De Berault finally decides to release the Duke de Foix and return to Paris to meet his punishment for his failure. Cardinal Richelieu at first warns de Berault that he will be executed for his failure to bring the Duke de Foix to trial. After hearing Marguerite's eloquent and impassioned pleading for de Berault's life, however, Richelieu relents and pardons de Berault. The film ends with the rebel leader in flight and the happy lovers, Gil and Marguerite, together once more.

The portrait that Veidt projected of de Berault was that of a melancholy and lonely adventurer but one with a very strict personal code of honor. In addition to the fine action and romance of the story, the scriptwriters and the actors managed to infuse a delicious and off-beat sense of humor that greatly increased the audience's enjoyment of this excellent film. This humor manifested itself in the amusing interplay of



Another fine film from England in 1937 was the adventure story *Under the Red Robe*. Veidt was cast as a swashbuckling swordsman who falls in love with Marguerite, portrayed by Annabella (right). The setting is France at the time of Cardinal Richelieu.

dialogue between Veidt's screen character (de Berault) and that of Romney Brent's character (Marius, de Berault's servant).

The film was based on the best-selling novel of the same name by Stanley Weyman, which had previously been done in 1923 as a silent. However, the 20th Century-Fox sound version of 1937 was by far the more interesting, more entertaining, and more expertly done motion picture. Veidt dominates this remarkable film and his adroit acting adds much to it. The fencing scenes between Veidt and other actors were very well done. Seastrom's direction is brilliant and Veidt's co-stars are outstanding in all respects. This was Seastrom's last directorial assignment before his retirement, and is a fitting testimonial to his skill as a director.

In 1937, during the shooting of this film at Denham studios, the producer Robert T. Kane hired as the dialogue director a man later to become very well known as a fine actor—Robert Morley. Morley later stated in his autobiography that there was one actor on the set of *Under the Red Robe* who needed no coaching or direction in his lines at all.<sup>2</sup> This was Conrad Veidt. Morley said that Veidt was an absolute master at delivering his lines. Veidt would speak very slowly and distinctly, when most of the other actors were speaking very quickly. Also Veidt would speak in a soft low voice, whereas the other players would be speaking rather loudly. The result was most effective, and the contrast was particularly noticeable. Veidt's way of speaking made the audience hang on to each word. His voice and delivery and enunciation were enchanting. Veidt's diction was precise and lucid, a carry-over from his early stage training in elocution.

For a brief excerpt from this excellent film, let me include part of the script for one scene that I especially liked, in which Veidt and Annabella are earnestly conversing. The screenplay had de Berault and Marguerite gradually falling in love and in this scene the following lines are spoken by the two lovers:

de Berault (Veidt): "The Black Death—that's what they call me. I'm not fit to lick your shoes."

Marguerite (Annabella): "What do I care what you *have been*? It's what you *are* that matters!"

And in another scene: Marguerite: "How can you live without something to believe in?"

de Berault: "I have my honor, madame, and my sword. I would face damnation if the mistress of the house cared for me."

2. *A Reluctant Autobiography*, by Robert Morley. Simon & Schuster, 1966.

These script lines may not be deathless prose but the way Veidt and Annabella expressed them was very fine acting and very touching cinema.

Film historian George MacDonald Fraser, in his fascinating book describes Veidt's performance in *Under the Red Robe* in these glowing words: "As a swaggering ruffler with a bedraggled feather in his hat, Conrad Veidt had no equal. No one could prowl with such controlled menace, or sweep a heroine off her feet with such sardonic charm."<sup>3</sup>

As a final item about this film, I include Conrad's own thoughts about his role. During an interview on the studio set, Conrad said: "In this film I am doing something I've wanted to do since I began acting twenty-five years ago. I've wanted to play a dashing, adventurous role, with fights and excitement. But I was not permitted to do those parts before. I was always in those very sinister parts. I love playing those villainous roles, too, of course. But those roles are mostly mental. But in *Under the Red Robe*, I fight with swords, I swim a river, and ride a horse. I am always fighting duels at the slightest provocation. I don't mind what risks I take. I tell you, I am enjoying it immensely!"

3. *The Hollywood History of the World*, by George MacDonald Fraser. William Morrow Co., 1988.



## 20

### More Information About Veidt and His Family

TO BEGIN THIS INTERMISSION between descriptions of Veidt's films, let me quote Veidt about himself and his thoughts on the power of suggestion. Veidt believed in extrasensory perception and, at times, was able to sense and foresee things and events that were beyond the range of normal human perception. Call it ESP or clairvoyance or pre-cognition, or whatever you prefer, Veidt was a sincere believer in this gift. As Veidt expressed it: "For what is it that matters in the final outcome? It is suggestion. I am a convinced spiritualist and a very good medium, and ever since my youth I have known what the power of suggestion can do. In my life it has been able to do everything, both artistic and human. I put the utmost heart and soul into things and I know that a great deal of my success is due to this. That is the reason, for instance, why such a great part as that of Cesare in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* excited me so much."

Because of his early beliefs in ESP and spiritualism, Conrad began a study of the occult that lasted all his life. Conrad sometimes confided in his close friends about the strange seances he had had with unknown spirits.

Conrad was a religious person and believed strongly in the value of prayer. He once said: "I believe we should all pray more, because when we pray, we always pray for something good."

Another unusual characteristic of Veidt's, beside his belief in spiritualism, was his lack of vanity. When a person receives a great deal of world acclaim, success, and fortune, it is quite understandable that he or she will be changed considerably by that circumstance. It is quite difficult, if not impossible, to maintain one's original outlook of modesty and humility in this situation. But Veidt never let the fame go to his head. He willingly and graciously gave autographs to his many fans, and interviews



Even as a young man, Conrad was a believer in extrasensory perception and the power of suggestion. A young journeyman actor, just starting on his long and difficult way to success, fame, and fortune, Conrad was photographed, as shown here, at age 24, while working for Richard Oswald's film studios in Berlin in 1917.

to feature writers of movie periodicals (although he disliked doing the latter). But Veidt never deceived himself or had any grandiose ideas of his importance. When asked by the German writer, Paul Ickes, for his permission and assistance in the preparation of his biography, Veidt demurred, in a pleasant way, stating: "What use is there for a biography of myself? I'm just a movie actor." He never allowed himself to acquire an inflated ego or an exalted opinion of himself. Years later, Veidt would say

in an interview with the press: "I have no illusions about my art. I am what the public made me and, consequently, I am not likely to forget my debt to them."

Conrad also used a paraphrased quotation to explain that he wasn't anyone of importance. He quoted an excerpt from Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*: "I am but a poor player that struts and frets his hour on stage and then is heard no more!"

Some observers of the theater arts have stated that Veidt was overly vain about his appearance. I believe this to be false. It's true that Conrad was meticulously careful about his appearance before going on stage or before the cinema camera's all-seeing and unforgiving eye. He knew that camera close-up shots could reveal an undesirable image of him if his costume didn't fit well or if his make-up wasn't properly applied. So as a result Conrad often spent considerable time and effort checking his appearance in mirrors before all filming sequences and making any necessary adjustments. Admittedly, Conrad was something of a perfectionist. But not for the sake of his ego but to make sure that he looked just right for the role he was portraying. Conrad's wife, Lily, often told people that Conrad had no vanity in his private life and that his concern for his appearance was solely for his art.

Although Conrad's primary interest lay in the field of acting, he also had a strong ambition and desire to do some film directing. He had already done some directing while working under contract for Richard Oswald, back in the 1920s. But Conrad wanted to try his hand at something else in the way of cinema directing, as he felt that being a director gave him much additional scope to express his artistic feelings and emotions. While under contract to Alexander Korda in England for several films, Conrad asked Korda to permit him to direct a film. The film that Conrad had in mind was the story of the private and public life of a London policeman. To Conrad, the life of an English policeman (or any policeman, for that matter) had the makings of a fascinating motion picture. But let Conrad express it in his own words: "I ask myself—what is it that has color and changing events, and is most exciting to the whole world? The answer is—a city, people, traffic, princes, beggars, typists, criminals. And who, in a big city, sees most of the game? A policeman! My film would open with the policeman standing in Piccadilly, the center of the world, in a sense. From there he follows the crowd. He peers into the drama of a million hearts, into the life of London. There are a



Veidt at the wheel of his sports car. Conrad liked to drive fast out on the open highway. This photo was probably taken sometime in the late 1920s.

thousand ways to treat such a film. It has great possibilities, for it is human. And that is the secret of filmmaking. The characters must be human, and not just lifeless dummies."

Unfortunately, this proposed motion picture never materialized and Conrad did not get another opportunity to direct a motion picture, as he wished so strongly to do.

Conrad's idea of the vast potential in a motion picture about the private and public life of a policeman has been confirmed and proven many times since then, with such highly interesting and successful recent U.S. films as *Detective Story* (1951) and the two versions of *The Blue Knight*, released in 1973 and 1975, respectively, with different casts. The locales were different, of course, but Conrad's premise was as valid for policemen in New York and Los Angeles as for policemen in London. As long as the script and acting and direction show authentic police work and realistic views, the life and work of a policeman makes for fascinating viewing and the motion picture can hardly fail to be a success.

One other aspect of Veidt's personality and his character was his professionalism at work. He was always punctual in arriving at the studio for work, and ready and prepared to do his scenes; that is, he knew his lines well and required very few re-takes. He had no drinking problem, as

many famous stars did, who would arrive on set in no condition to perform. Nor was he "difficult" to work with, as many temperamental top stars were. Conrad was most congenial and charming, on the set and off.

Many screen stars had a conscious (or perhaps unconscious) way of alienating the other actors on the set; or of antagonizing the studio crew who handled all the important but unglamorous jobs such as electricians, cameramen, wardrobe mistresses, script assistants, hairdressers, make-up personnel, sound engineers, etc.

Some actors and actresses would deliberately speak their lines differently than written in the script, causing the co-star to miss his cue. Many stars would be argumentative and contentious about the script, about the lighting, about their co-stars' acting, about the costumes, about who was getting top billing, and countless other details of the production. These "prima donnas" would often make unreasonable demands of the producer and director. Veidt was not of this type. He was thoughtful and considerate of the wishes and feelings of the director, the other cast members, and the studio crew. Veidt was a favorite of the studio crews at all the studios at which he worked.

Conrad, although perhaps more experienced in stage and screen work than many of the younger film directors for which he worked, never tried to inflict his professional opinions on them or on the producers about the current job at hand, or on how to do a certain scene. In other words, Conrad didn't try to tell the director how to do his job.

Conrad *did* have a bit of a problem waking up in the morning. Some people can wake up and spring out of bed and be wide awake and immediately ready for a full day of work or play. Conrad, however, was not one of their number. Veidt was more of a "night person" than a "day person," and he had considerable difficulty to "get going" in the morning. It would usually take him a full hour or two to really wake up and be alert enough to face the day. Then he would have his breakfast. Thus, if he was to be at the studio for shooting at eight o'clock in the morning, it would be necessary for him to be awakened at about half-past five.

Conrad was totally professional in his preparation for a new film. He was a "quick study" when it came to learning his lines from the script. Conrad had the rare ability to quickly sense the gist of a screenplay, and then communicate, through his screen portrayal, the desires and intentions of the screenwriters and the film directors, with a minimum of direction and rehearsal. Conrad felt he must immerse himself completely

in the role and in the story. He tried to learn all that he could about the role he was assigned and the character he was to portray, and attempted to assume the personality of that character as he saw it. Conrad didn't just *play* a character—he *became* that character in his thoughts and actions.

Conrad was always careful in speaking his lines, so that there wouldn't be a great many time-consuming and expensive re-takes.

Still another indication of Veidt's professionalism in his motion picture work is the fact that he tried to learn his lines for the entire film, not just the lines for a particular scene or for one day's shooting. He did this before the cinema shooting even began. Thus, when adverse conditions on the set (such as unexpected rain ruining an outdoor scene's shooting; or a lack of needed items in the wardrobe or "props" departments causing a lengthy delay; or illness of one of the actors or actresses; etc) caused the director to cancel one scheduled scene and proceed with another, Conrad would be able to adapt to the sudden change and do his scenes with little or no practice or prompting.

Perhaps the best way to set forth Conrad's philosophy of life regarding his acting career would be to let Conrad express it himself: "It is my greatest joy to live a really good part, even though it imposes great strain. An artist is tired but proud when he has created a great work of art. So it is with the actor who really lives a great role and is proud of the part he played."



Conrad and his wife, Lily, in their home near London, about 1937.



Proud father Conrad is seen here in England with teenage daughter Viola, each holding a pet, circa 1938.

Conrad's sincere desire to improve his acting ability manifested itself in his appreciation of candid criticism of his work. Many actors are willing to read and hear only favorable opinions of their stage and screen work. Conrad revealed, in an interview, some of his thoughts about truth and constructive criticism: "We should strive to attain a high state in which we shall speak the truth for its own sake, concealing nothing because the truth cannot harm us. We shall have grown too big to be offended when our friends tell us what they think about us. Everyone will snatch at the truth as a means of betterment, in the same way that I now appreciate the many letters I receive from people criticizing my work, just as much as those letters from filmgoers who merely 'like me on the screen.'"

Conrad wasn't a violent man by any measure, and he very rarely lost his temper. But there was one incident that occurred on the express train from Geneva to Paris in the early summer of 1939 that really upset him. Conrad was escorting his daughter, Viola, from her home in Geneva to his home in London for their annual reunion. Viola called these summer

vacation visits with her dear father "The Happy Times" because that is exactly what they were to her.

On this particular occasion, Conrad and Viola had bade goodbye to Felicitas and had boarded the train for Paris at the Geneva station. Soon after Conrad and Viola had gotten settled and comfortable in their train compartment, the conductor came through their car, checking tickets, and also passports, as they would be leaving Switzerland soon and entering France.

Viola at this time was only fourteen years old but she was rather tall and looked considerably older, easily passing for a young lady of eighteen. The conductor, on entering the Veidt compartment, recognized Conrad as the film star he was, and asked him for an autograph. Conrad obliged. The conductor then stared at Viola and, with a leer, made some suggestive and offensive remark about male movie stars sharing their train berths with young women!

To say that Conrad was irate would be putting it mildly. He exploded, venting his anger on the conductor with both words and fists. Conrad lunged at the man, punched him twice and forced the conductor to flee from the car as fast as he could run. The conductor never entered the Veidt compartment again for the remainder of the trip.

Another story recently told to me by Viola is that one day in 1934, a man came to their home on Kaiserdamm street in Berlin stating that he was a telephone repairman and that there was something wrong with the Veidt telephone. No one from the Veidt residence had reported any such problem but they allowed him to enter anyway and work on their phone. Viola and Felicitas strongly believed that the man had come there to arrange to put a "tap" on their phone, since Conrad Veidt was a political exile who refused to return to Germany or to assist the Nazis in any way, and the Nazis wished to monitor the family phone calls.

All the time since Conrad and Felicitas had separated, and later divorced, Conrad had written almost daily to his dear Viola. Almost every day Viola would receive a letter or a postcard from England from her father. As time went by, Conrad was also kept aware of the deteriorating situation in Germany. He knew, for example, that Viola and her schoolmates were now required to shout "Heil Hitler" at the beginning of their classes each day, and use that greeting at other times, too. In their music classes, they were taught to sing the "Horst Wessel Lied," the official song of the Nazi Party. Conrad was becoming increasingly worried



about the situation, and more and more concerned about the safety and welfare of his daughter and ex-wife. Finally, in 1935, when he learned that Viola was soon to be forcibly enrolled and indoctrinated into the "Bund Deutscher Maedchen," the German Girls Association, which was supposedly controlled by the Nazis, Conrad decided to wait no longer. He immediately began making arrangements for Felicitas and Viola to move out of Nazi Germany to neutral Switzerland as quickly as it could be done. However, there was a great deal of paperwork to be accomplished, and the Nazis didn't make the red tape process any easier for the well-known anti-Nazi actor or his family. Thus it was a full three months later that Felicitas and Viola arrived in Geneva and took up residence in an apartment there.

Conrad was very fond of Felicitas' mother, Frau Radke, and she in turn respected and liked Conrad, even after he divorced her daughter. Conrad offered to arrange for Frau Radke also to leave Germany and move to Switzerland. The proud, indomitable, and outspoken old lady refused, however, declining the offer with thanks. She said that she was the widow of a Prussian Army officer who had served under the Kaiser in World War I, and "no damned little Austrian Nazi corporal was going to make her leave her home!" Frau Radke did survive World War II, but things were harsh and difficult for her. Conrad, Felicitas, and Viola never saw her again, although they did correspond.

From the age of ten, Viola resided in Switzerland with her mother. She was enrolled in a private school there. Even though Conrad and Felicitas were divorced, they had parted amicably and remained good friends thereafter, with Conrad sending quite generous checks to Felicitas and Viola each month. In addition, each year, Viola would visit with her father and his new wife, Lily, in England or France, spending three or four months of happiness with them. Viola was not able to come to the United States again until 1946, several months after World War II had ended.

While on summer vacation from school in 1937, Viola was visiting with her father and stepmother in London. As Conrad was taking part in a new film, he had to leave for work at the studio early each morning. So one day Lily and Viola decided to do some shopping downtown and then take in a movie after lunch. They went to see *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* at Viola's request. Lily and Viola were wearing suits with just a white dickey blouse in front.

It was quite hot that afternoon and unhappily the theater had no air

conditioning. About halfway through the film Lily and Viola decided to remove their jackets, feeling much cooler thereafter. However, they soon began to hear, and notice, suppressed giggles, snickers, and barely stifled laughter coming from the seats behind them. Lily and Viola gradually realized that the laughter was not caused by the events transpiring on the screen but was aimed at them because of their bare backs!

Apparently this was too daring for folks at that time. So, reluctantly, on came their jackets again and Lily and Viola perspired through the rest of the film. When Conrad came home from work that evening he had a good hearty laugh with Lily and Viola about the "bare backs incident" at the theater.

In the late fall of 1937, Conrad called from England to Felicitas' home in Geneva and informed Viola that it was all arranged for Viola to spend the winter with himself and Lily in St. Moritz. It was agreed that Felicitas would escort Viola to St. Moritz and then stay with her for a few days until Conrad and Lily arrived there. Then Felicitas would return to Geneva. Conrad and Lily would stay at the Palace Hotel and Viola would stay at a boarding school called Belmunt, located in the Alps above St. Moritz. The skiing there was fabulous and Viola and Lily would be able to enjoy it almost daily. Conrad, although he wanted to try the skiing also, had strict orders from his studio not to ski. In the event he were to break an arm or leg, it would mean lengthy delays on his new motion picture due to start shooting in about three weeks. So Conrad took long walks and played quite a bit of golf, for exercise and recreation, while his wife and daughter were skiing, and he would meet them later in the day at Hauselman's cafe. This cafe and pastry shop had the most incredibly delicious eclairs and petit fours, and Conrad, Lily, and Viola gorged themselves happily with these irresistible pastries.

While in the cafe, Conrad and Lily listened intently as Viola told them about her life in Geneva. Conrad asked how things were at school. Viola explained that her mother had enrolled her at the Ecole Internationale (an exclusive private school that catered to children whose parents were wealthy or of noble lineage or were with the diplomatic corps). On one side of Viola sat an Egyptian girl. On the other side a Chinese girl was seated. To Viola's rear sat a girl wearing a native costume of Greece. None of these girls spoke or understood French, German, or Italian—the official languages of Switzerland. It was weeks before Viola could converse with them. But in the process each learned something of the others'



In this photograph Conrad gave his autograph and his greetings to a fan in 1936. Note the mole, and the distended veins in the temple area of his forehead; both trademarks of this fine actor.

country, language, and culture. It wasn't long before they became close friends.

Viola eagerly related that she was learning French and English, as well as other required academic subjects in a liberal arts course. Viola also

mentioned that she had met several boy students from a nearby boys' school. One boy she had met at a school dance, whom she liked, was Prince Phumiphon, who later would become the King of Siam. At that time, however, Viola was more impressed with what a fine dancer Phumiphon was and how well he played the saxophone in the school band.

Viola also told me recently of an incident, embarrassing to her father, that occurred in Geneva in 1939. It was at the beginning of Viola's summer vacation and she was preparing to go to London to visit with her father and stepmother for three months. On that particular day her father had arrived at the Geneva railroad station where Viola met him and accompanied him to the Hotel des Berques. After her father had registered at the hotel, Viola escorted him to the apartment where she and her mother resided.

While Felicitas was helping Viola in packing her luggage for the trip, Conrad browsed through the apartment, examining the many exquisite objets d'art which Felicitas liked to collect. In the dining room Conrad spied a pillbox in a crystal bowl. On noticing her father opening the pillbox, Viola called out, "Daddy, be careful. They are very strong laxatives." Whereupon her father replied, "Traveling always upsets my digestion. Two of these tiny tablets will be just what I need. Don't worry, darling. I'll be fine." With that, he swallowed the two pills. Soon Felicitas served a delicious lunch, after which Conrad returned to his hotel and Viola finished her packing. The understanding was that father and daughter would leave for Paris at nine o'clock the next morning. That evening Viola went to bed early, thinking happily of the days ahead in England.

At seven a.m. the telephone rang. Viola answered and heard her father say, "Fuchsi, come over to my hotel immediately. We are not leaving until tomorrow." When Viola inquired as to the reason for the delay, her father replied, "I can't get out of the bathroom. Come here, please. You must send a wire to Lily for me. I can't get to the phone long enough!" (click)

On arrival at the hotel Viola conferred with her father through the closed bathroom door. Viola learned that she must send a wire to Lily, advising of the delay; get the tickets for the train and the Calais-Dover ferry changed to a day later; and call the hotel doctor for some anti-diarrhea medication for her father. At this particular moment, as he suffered through a severe case of diarrhea, Conrad was hardly the epitome

of poise and charm; hardly the paragon of elegance of attire that the world knew as Conrad Veidt, the international star of stage and screen. I include this little anecdote only to show that Conrad also had the same weaknesses, afflictions, and occasional lapses of good judgment that we less famous humans have.

All was back to normal the next day. "Fuchsi" and "Der silber Fuchs" (the silver fox), as Viola had recently begun to call her distinguishedly gray-templed father, were happily on their way to England to spend some time together with each other and with Lily.

On a different note entirely, Viola told me recently of a period in her early childhood which may have been the initial cause for her life-long aversion to her mother. When Viola was just an infant, Conrad and Felicitas hired a baby nurse, Dedda, who came very highly recommended by the employment agency. She was a rather plain-looking, middle-aged woman. She brought impeccable references from her previous employers and proved to be a very capable nurse insofar as her duties with Viola were concerned.

It soon became apparent to another Veidt employee, Rosie the maid, that Dedda was secretly and insanely in love with her employer, Conrad Veidt. Rosie, when making up Dedda's bed each day, found pictures of Conrad under the pillow. In addition, there were also little personal items belonging to Conrad found under her pillow, such as his monogrammed handkerchief, or his comb, or one of his ties, or a pair of Conrad's cuff links, etc. However, the maid didn't report Dedda's petty thefts and odd behavior to Mr. and Mrs. Veidt, fearing that Dedda would be discharged and possibly be unable to get a new position.

Dedda apparently was pretending to herself that Viola was her love child from Conrad Veidt. Whenever Mr. Veidt came into the nursery and came near Viola and Dedda, Dedda was in heaven. She would hold the baby up for Conrad to see, and she would smile coquettishly at him. When Mrs. Veidt came near Viola's crib, however, Dedda immediately became jealously possessive of the little girl. Dedda had somehow secretly indoctrinated Viola to make a fuss and cry loudly whenever Felicitas picked her up and held her. On Dedda's one day off each week, Viola wouldn't eat or sleep or behave properly. But when in Dedda's care, Viola behaved like a little angel.

Because of Dedda's ability to care for, and manage, Viola, she was asked to come to America with the Veidt family in 1926 to continue her duties.

Although Conrad and Felicitas weren't completely satisfied with Dedda, they felt that since Viola seemed happy and healthy in Dedda's care, perhaps they should retain her services.

Viola as a small child, and as an *only* child, often would resort to tantrums whenever she didn't get her way. Felicitas' method of dealing with Viola's tantrums was to shake the child while scolding her severely in a high screaming voice, which only made matters worse. So Conrad would then gently pick Viola up and carry her to her room. There he would place her on her favorite puma skin rug and softly tell her, "When you feel better, you may come out," and he would leave. Viola would then scream and kick for a few more moments but she soon realized that without an audience, a tantrum was useless. Conrad's firm but gentle disciplinary method gradually cured Viola of her violent tantrums. The exception to this policy of Conrad's was the first and only time that he ever spanked Viola.

When Viola was about three or four years old, she remembers being especially naughty one day during mealtime with her father and mother. When Jean, the butler, brought Viola's tray of food to the table, Viola not only refused to eat the food, but flung the dishes of food at the servant. Conrad was very upset at this deplorable behavior and was visibly irate. He immediately picked Viola up, carried her to her bedroom and spanked her soundly. Viola was left crying in her room to think about the consequences of her conduct, and Conrad returned to the dining room, pale and shaken. Felicitas, as well as the servant, could see there were tears streaming down Conrad's face, and he was loudly berating himself for having spanked his daughter! He kept repeating that Viola's little derriere wasn't even as large as his hand but yet he had beaten her with his hand. He was a beast, he said! Conrad never spanked Viola again after that incident.

Viola told me that when she was finally able to leave Europe and emigrate to America, in 1946, she took up residence in Florida. There she was married and settled down happily to life in Coral Gables. Viola also related that while she and her husband, Robert Parnahay, were on vacation in New York City in early 1947, they went to a nightclub called Tony's West Side. While there, Viola noticed an attractive blond lady at one of the nearby tables whose face seemed quite familiar. Viola recognized her as being Lilian Harvey, the famous actress, who co-starred with Conrad Veidt in two hit films. Viola told me that Miss Harvey had

been a close friend of Conrad and Felicitas, and was a frequent guest at the Veidt family residence in Berlin, often bringing gifts for Viola. As such, Lilian had known Viola since Viola was a little girl five years old, but they hadn't seen each other for many years.

Viola went over to Lilian's table and introduced herself. Viola and Lilian then embraced and both had a little cry. Then, after an evening of dining and dancing, Lilian invited Viola and Robert to her apartment in Manhattan. There they looked through the enormous scrapbooks Lilian had. This brought on an emotional reaction of alternating laughter and tears as they saw familiar people and places in the photographs. Each time Viola saw a photograph of her father, such as in scenes from *Congress Dances* and *Ich und die Kaiserin* with Miss Harvey, it brought tears to her eyes. It had been four years since her father had died but Viola still couldn't accept the fact that she would never see or talk to her father again. The photographs also helped Viola and Lilian recall the pleasant times they had experienced in Germany during the late 1920s and early 1930s. When the cancer of Nazism befell Germany and Conrad arranged for Felicitas and Viola to settle in Switzerland, Lilian Harvey had fled Germany to reside in Hollywood, where she starred in several films.

The Veidts preferred a quiet evening at home, instead of the constant nightclub-visiting and party-attending schedule expected of movie stars. Conrad and Lily didn't match the glamorous image movie fans held of them. Conrad and Lily enjoyed sitting by their cheery blazing fireplace, in the cozy living room of their home, "Milestone." There they would spend a pleasant evening reading their books, or playing cards or, on occasion, having a close friend or two over for dinner and an evening of friendly conversation over a glass or two of sherry. On rare occasions Conrad and Lily would go out to a stage play or a film or a concert.

Most of the friends who were invited to the Veidts' home were famous people themselves and were usually connected in some way with the motion picture industry. One such invited guest was Marlene Dietrich, who spent the better part of one Sunday in the summer of 1936 at the Veidt home. Miss Dietrich thoroughly enjoyed her visit with Conrad and Lily. Marlene recounted her struggling days in the early 1920s on the German stage and later in the films. Marlene and Conrad told anecdotes about their respective successes and failures in those halcyon days in Berlin and other cities. Lily enjoyed hearing these stories as much as Conrad and Marlene enjoyed telling them.

Over the course of the evening of delightful food and conversation, Conrad and Marlene compared notes and laughingly marveled at the coincidental similarities in their lives and careers. Both were born in Berlin. Both came from middle-class families. Each had a father with a military background. Each (with their respective spouses) had one child only, a daughter. Both daughters were born in Berlin in 1925. Marlene's daughter Maria (nicknamed Heidede) and Conrad's daughter Viola were born in the same hospital, only a few months apart. Both Conrad and Marlene took their early stage training under Max Reinhardt and acted in his Deutsches Theater productions. Both went from the German stage to greater success and fame in German films. Both went to Hollywood after successful careers in Germany. Both had been approached by Nazi bigwigs after 1933 to star in Nazi propaganda films. Both refused the Nazi offers and the films of both Veidt and Dietrich were banned thereafter in Germany and Austria.

Although there were many similarities in the lives and careers of Conrad and Marlene that were freely discussed that evening in the Veidt home, there was one other marked similarity that was, for the sake of discretion, not mentioned in Lily's presence. This was the alleged bisexual nature of Conrad and Marlene. Marlene expressed it best, on another occasion, when she gave the following frank statement to a magazine feature writer: "In Europe, it doesn't matter whether you're a man or a woman. We make love with anyone we find attractive!" Although Conrad never expressed his personal opinion on this subject so candidly to the press, he allegedly followed a similar lifestyle in which he engaged, on occasion, in sexual affairs with persons of either gender.

Among the many anecdotes told that evening, Conrad recalled a fancy dress ball that he had attended in the early 1920s, given in Berlin at the elegant mansion of Professor Robert, the owner of the Schloss Park Theater in Berlin. Conrad stated that all of the elite of the stage and screen were at the ball. Max Reinhardt was only one of the distinguished and famous personages there. Conrad stated that he still remembered the superb tango that Marlene danced that evening. The crowd was so impressed that they ceased their own dancing and animated conversations and just watched Marlene and her partner dancing. It was the hit of the ball.

For one of her anecdotes, Marlene laughingly related how she had failed her first audition for Max Reinhardt in 1921. Marlene then stated that a year later she auditioned for Reinhardt again and this time she was



accepted as a student in Reinhardt's justly famous drama school.

Marlene then related an unforgettable but unpleasant incident from her early career. It was in December, 1929, during the filming of *The Blue Angel*, the motion picture that made Marlene a star. The male lead, Emil Jannings, was an established star of the German stage and screen. Jannings, however, had an ego every bit as large as his hulking, obese body. He deeply resented the selection of a complete unknown as his leading lady. Jannings preferred the seasoned actress, Lucie Mannheim, as the film's feminine lead, and he made his feelings known in no uncertain terms to producer Erich Pommer and director Josef von Sternberg. But Jannings was over-ruled by Pommer and Sternberg and the selection of Dietrich was confirmed.

Whereupon Jannings became almost paranoid as he observed director Sternberg's attentiveness and "favoritism" towards Dietrich. At one point in the filming, this deep-seated resentment came to the surface as Jannings performed his role. This was the scene in which Jannings' character, Professor Rath, attempts to strangle his unfaithful paramour Lola-Lola (Dietrich). Jannings displayed such obvious hostility and excessive force that he nearly *did* strangle Marlene. Nearby actors and film crew members had to pry Jannings' hands away from the throat of the thoroughly frightened Marlene. Marlene made the decision then and there never to work with Jannings again.

Apparently Marlene never forgave Jannings for that frightening incident. Several years after the release of *The Blue Angel*, Marlene was interviewed by a film magazine columnist. First, Marlene was asked her opinion of the film and gave a favorable reply. Then she was asked her opinion of Emil Jannings' performance in the film. Marlene surprised the columnist with the vehemence and candor of her reply. She stated: "I thought Jannings was awful in it. Such a terrible ham!"

As mentioned before, at the very same time that Jannings and Dietrich were performing in the filming on one UFA sound stage, Veidt was performing on the very next sound stage in the filming of *Die Letzte Kompagnie*. Occasionally, when his scenes were completed and he had some free time, Conrad would walk over to the "Blue Angel" set and observe the filming there.

Marlene also reminded Conrad of another coincidence in which they had participated in the same play together, although Conrad was one of the major stars while Marlene had a very minor role. Marlene stated that

it was on March 28, 1929, at the Staats-Theater in Berlin. It was a special benefit and memorial performance for the late Albert Steinrück, the fine German actor. The play was a single performance only and was presented at eleven p.m. so that the cast members, of what was an all-star cast, could complete their regular daytime work at their own theaters and be ready to perform in this play. The play was entitled *Der Marquis von Keith*. The theater was filled and the play was a huge success. Marlene mentioned that it was the only time on stage or in films that she had worked in the same cast as Conrad.

Conrad then recounted an amusing incident that had taken place very early in his stage career, about 1914. Conrad explained that in those days in Berlin, young novice actors such as himself were given only extremely small parts; mere walk-on roles, with few or no spoken lines. But by going out to the small towns in the remote provinces of Germany, these tyro actors could often perform major roles in interesting stage productions. Conrad stated that one evening long ago, in one such small town, he was slated to play the male lead opposite a famous actress. Let's call her "Ilsa," which was not her real name. This actress was to make a special guest appearance that night and was due to arrive that evening by train at twenty minutes past seven. As the curtain was scheduled to open at eight, this late arrival would prevent the two leading players, Conrad and Ilsa, from rehearsing their roles together.

To make matters worse, the theater manager learned that Ilsa's train would arrive twenty minutes late. Conrad said he shivered as he stood in his tiny, drafty dressing room, clad in a thin medieval toga for his role. He stated that the shiver was due only partially to the cold air coming into his room from a broken window. The rest was due to an ominous feeling that tonight's play would end in disaster. The theater manager came to Conrad's dressing room and, noticing Conrad pacing up and down seeming nervous, attempted to reassure Conrad that everything would be fine. "Veidt," he said, "stop worrying. Ilsa has done this role many times and she has been a great success in it each time. Nothing is going to go wrong. In case you forget your lines, keep an eye on the stage prompter."

Thirty nerve-wracking minutes went by and then, finally, there was a commotion backstage as Ilsa burst into the theater. She poked her head into Conrad's dressing room and stated: "You are my stage partner tonight, I hear." Conrad replied, "Yes, ma'am." Ilsa looked at the tall, gangling Conrad, laughed and said teasingly, "You're a little small for me,

aren't you, dearie?" Conrad looked at the famous actress and just stood there, speechless with awe. Ilsa was a gorgeous, stunning, experienced woman, Conrad thought to himself, and it was an honor for him to play opposite her.

The next thing Conrad knew they were on the stage and the curtain was going up. He found, to his delight, that he was in good form and that he knew his lines well. Reinhardt's strict training was paying off and Conrad became more confident. But to Conrad's surprise and dismay Ilsa was in poor form that night. Conrad poured out his heart in the role, with soaring emotion. He told the feminine lead that he was not going to live with her for even a moment. "Our paths are parting," he shouted to Ilsa. But the famous actress only stared back at him—helpless, terribly embarrassed and wide-eyed with fright. Not a word of dialogue came from her painted lips. Conrad said that he began to improvise dialogue to cover the embarrassing silence from Ilsa. "I'm leaving you. Don't try to stop me. You are wasting your breath!" But still no answer from Ilsa. Fortunately, the audience hadn't realized the meaning of the situation transpiring on the stage. Conrad said that he wondered what was the matter with Ilsa. Why didn't she respond with her lines that she had spoken dozens of times on other stages? Why wasn't she playing her role?

In desperation, Conrad continued his ad-libbed dialogue, all the while sending imploring glances to the prompter and to the theater manager standing in the wings. "You are holding your tongue," Conrad shouted. "Because you know very well that every word would be wasted on me. You know your coquetry is lost on me." Conrad was thinking he would be lost completely if the actress didn't react and respond soon. What else could he say? Then Conrad noticed that Ilsa was turning deathly pale. Next the prompter shouted across the stage to Ilsa but she did not utter a word. And then, suddenly, it happened—with a sigh, Ilsa fainted and fell heavily to the stage floor.

Conrad said he then rushed to Ilsa's side and knelt down, trying to obscure Ilsa's face from the audience. He then attempted to continue with his role while at the same time he tried to revive Ilsa and also ascertain what was the matter with the actress. Conrad shouted at her, "Now you see what your hard-heartedness has done to you? You are breaking down yourself." But in a soft whispered aside, Conrad asked, "What is the matter, Ilsa?" The actress' only reply was, "Lower the curtain!"

Conrad stated that he then got to his feet, and with shaking knees, walked to the wings and conveyed Ilsa's message to the stage manager. At this point, in the middle of the scene, in the first act, the curtain came slowly down. This was followed immediately by the theater manager coming out on stage and explaining the situation to the audience.

Conrad recounted to Lily and Marlene Dietrich, on that summer Sunday in 1936, that the memory of that disastrous play from his early stage career had taught him some important lessons. He learned the importance of having full cast rehearsals prior to the opening curtain. He learned that serious preparation by an actor for his roles, though often tedious, was necessary in his development as an actor. He also learned something about himself: In an unexpected and difficult emergency situation on the stage, in front of a large audience, he had kept his composure, had improvised his own dialogue, and had performed in a creditable manner. These three lessons helped Conrad considerably throughout the rest of his career.



In the 1937 British espionage thriller *Dark Journey* Veidt, as Baron von Marwitz, is surrounded by a bevy of admiring women. Vivien Leigh (not pictured) was his co-star in this tale of two spies, from opposing sides, falling in love in World War I Stockholm.

## 21

### Exit Gaumont—Enter Korda

**I**N 1936 THE GAUMONT-BRITISH studio was greatly weakened by two company disasters. One was a terrible financial crisis that stripped the company of working capital. The other was the departure of its dynamic head of production, Michael Balcon. Balcon had been in charge of film production for Gaumont for many years and as such was responsible for many of the successful films Gaumont had produced. With his departure and the severe financial crisis, however, production of films ceased and the company itself all but collapsed. Gaumont-British was later absorbed by the Rank Organization.

One of the many results of this cessation of film production was that Veidt's contract with G-B came to an end, and Veidt was a free agent. At this point, Conrad was advised by an old and trusted friend to contact Alexander Korda, who was fast becoming one of the most influential cinema magnates in Britain. Veidt did contact Korda's office and requested an interview. Conrad was amazed at the rapidity with which he was ushered into Korda's office. Korda offered Veidt a generous long-term contract to star in several Korda productions.

Korda's rather impulsive decision to sign Veidt to a contract proved to be very sound business acumen. Veidt was given leading roles in several Korda films which were highly successful commercially. Veidt soon became one of Korda's two biggest stars (the other was Charles Laughton). The relationship between Veidt and Korda was one of mutual admiration and respect, and they were very cordial with each other throughout their business and social contacts. (Korda and Laughton, on the other hand, were frequently at odds and involved in bitter arguments which damaged and limited their business relationship.)



Conrad is seen here in a charming still photo from the espionage thriller *Dark Journey*. The lovely Vivien Leigh supplied the love interest as well as being one of the spies involved in this fascinating film.

Charles Laughton was a remarkably fine actor but also an extremely difficult and uncooperative man to work with. Director Alfred Hitchcock once described his feelings about Laughton by saying: "You can't *direct* a Laughton picture. The best you can hope for is to *referee*!" Veidt, on the other hand, was a thoroughly amenable individual who got along well with all his directors, as well as other cast members and film crew.

Veidt's first film under his new contract was *Dark Journey*, a fascinating film produced and directed by Victor Saville. Veidt was cast as Baron von Marwitz and Vivien Leigh played the part of Madeleine Godard. The plot concerns the conflict between a German Secret Service agent's loyalty to his country and his love for the lovely French spy (Leigh). The setting of the film is Stockholm, Sweden, during World War I. Vivien Leigh was absolutely radiant in this role and casting her as the charming feminine lead opposite Veidt's character provided a delightful touch. Also having a featured role was Anthony Bushell as the British

secret agent. In addition there is a very lovely and haunting musical theme that runs through this film, providing a charming bonus.

*Dark Journey* was completed on schedule in five weeks of filming at the London Film Studios in Denham. Director Saville was able to get remarkable performances from Conrad Veidt, Vivien Leigh, Anthony Bushell, and the rest of the fine cast.

The film critic of the *News Chronicle* (in his column of March 27, 1937) gave a rhyming capsule review of *Dark Journey*: "Conrad Veidt takes his monocle far out to sea, with Q ship and U-boats and Vivien Leigh."

During the exhibition of this film in London there was a gigantic advertising poster displayed on the side of a building in Piccadilly Square. It showed a twenty foot tall picture of Conrad Veidt's face, and the caption stated: "CONRAD VEIDT, the master spy in DARK JOURNEY, and introducing Vivien Leigh."



A tender love that blossoms amid wartime espionage in *Dark Journey*. Vivien Leigh (left) is the lovely and dedicated French spy who falls in love with Conrad Veidt's character, the handsome and equally dedicated German spy. The story develops into a bittersweet ending for the two lovers.



One of Vivien Leigh's earliest films was her role opposite Conrad Veidt in the fascinating espionage thriller *Dark Journey*, released in 1937.

One of the better motion pictures to come out of Great Britain in 1938 was the Michael Powell-directed thriller *The Spy in Black* (also known as *U-Boat 29*). This British-Columbia release starred Veidt as Captain Hardt, the commander of a German submarine, with Valerie Hobson, Marius Goring, Sebastian Shaw, June Duprez, and Mary Morris rounding out the excellent cast. The story centered around the efforts of British Intelligence agents in foiling the German attempt to sink a flotilla of British naval ships. The setting is Scotland in World War I. Valerie Hobson plays the role of a charming, mysterious double agent. The plot combines surprise twists and a marvelous bittersweet romance between the Veidt and Hobson characters.

The film begins with a German submarine attack on Allied ships. Later, Captain Hardt (Veidt) is ordered to observe the British Navy warships in the harbor at Scapa Flow. He is landed on the Scottish coast by submarine, and then travels by motorcycle to meet his English



schoolteacher-spy contact (Hobson). Captain Hardt then attempts to gather information about the British fleet's size, composition, and movements, so that German U-Boats may attack the fleet.

Hardt is unaware that the schoolteacher he is meeting with is a double agent, working with British Intelligence to snare the Germans. The film shows the intrigue and the battle of wits between the German and British opposing sides. The ingredient of romance between Captain Hardt and the English schoolteacher added to the entertainment value of this espionage thriller.

There were several places in the script of *The Spy in Black* which called for German to be spoken, not only by the actors portraying German Navy personnel but also by the British spies in the screenplay. Two of these British spies were Valerie Hobson and Mary Morris. Hobson portrayed the role of the double agent, Miss Burnett. Morris gave a convincing performance as the German chauffeur of the kidnap vehicle. Neither Hobson nor Morris had any previous knowledge of the German language.



Conrad is seen here as Captain Hardt in the film *The Spy in Black*. One can clearly see the sad look of betrayal on his face at this moment as Captain Hardt realizes that the woman he trusted is really a double agent working for the British Intelligence Service.



Conrad and Valerie Hobson were the leading players in the 1939 thriller *The Spy in Black*.

At this point, as the filming was postponed, director Powell decided to enlist the assistance of the most qualified and most readily available German-speaking person on the set—the leading man, Herr Veidt. Director Powell asked Conrad if he would coach the two ladies with their German dialogue. Conrad was instantly agreeable and began tutoring the two actresses in the correct pronunciation of their difficult German sentences. After Veidt's tutoring, Hobson and Morris sounded almost like natives of Berlin, and filming of their scenes resumed.

Michael Powell was a sincere admirer of Veidt. In his fascinating autobiography he stated: "Conrad Veidt was often regarded as the most brilliant actor in the German theater. But Veidt was such an overpowering personality that directors were afraid of him. In private life, though, he was the sweetest and most easy of human beings."<sup>1</sup>

1. *A Life in the Movies*, by Michael Powell. Knopf & Co., 1987.

Powell further stated this about Veidt: "I had been longing to get my hands on Conrad Veidt to direct him in a film ever since he came to England. Emeric Pressburger and I looked upon Conrad Veidt as a legendary figure ... an actor we venerated; one of the greatest names in European cinema; one of the most romantic and magnetic men alive."

Incidentally, as part of the publicity campaign for *The Spy in Black*, the studio press agent initiated a clever and effective plan to advertise the film. He chose the delayed, indirect approach, similar to Erich Pommer's masterly method of advertisting *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

Michael Powell's press agent arranged a saturation campaign of "Wanted" posters advertising a reward for the finder of the Spy in Black, which also showed a picture of Veidt dressed in black clothing, and the accompanying legend stated "Last seen wearing these clothes!" These posters were placed throughout London quite some time before the film appeared in a large London theater. Londoners were abuzz with excited comments and questions about the spy and the reward. It wasn't long until they learned it all had to do with a thrilling new espionage film. The



In 1938, Alexander Korda produced an exciting spy drama, co-starring Veidt as the German submarine commander, and Valerie Hobson (right) as the mysterious double agent he meets in Scotland. The film was entitled *The Spy in Black* and was also exhibited as *U-Boat 29*.



Veidt (foreground, with pistol) in a tense scene from the 1938 espionage thriller *The Spy in Black*.

promotional campaign had been an unqualified success, as the theater was packed night after night.

The British movie periodical *The Monthly Film Bulletin* said in part, "Conrad Veidt is brilliant in the lead. He is throughout a tragic if slightly sinister figure, and wins respect and sympathy as a patriot with the qualities that are admirable and admired in soldier, sailor, or airman of any nationality."

This film was very successful in the theaters, and also received critical acclaim when it was selected for the National Board of Review Award as one of the Ten Best Films of the Year. Veidt gave such a fine performance as the aristocratic German naval officer that Hollywood producers soon beckoned to him, wiring offers of lucrative contracts for similar film roles.

Another person who was greatly impressed and influenced by Veidt's acting style is the British film star, Christopher Lee. Lee, because of his gaunt features, has been typecast in similar roles as Veidt in horror and thriller films (*Rasputin, The Hands of Orlac, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*). He admits he has deliberately tried to model himself in films after Veidt's example and acting style.

In his highly diverting biography, Lee states that in 1938, as a young man of sixteen, he saw his first Veidt film *The Spy in Black* and he has been an admirer of Veidt since then.<sup>2</sup> Lee goes on to relate that two days after seeing the film, a marvelous coincidence occurred. Lee was strolling on the Wentworth golf course in England with a friend of his mother's when a golf ball suddenly landed on the green near them. A moment later the golfer who had hit the ball appeared, at which time Lee was astonished to recognize the golfer as none other than Conrad Veidt! As Lee stood there with his mouth agape, Conrad came over, shook hands both with Lee and his friend, and then chatted with them in a most friendly manner for the next thirty minutes. Young Lee was greatly impressed with Veidt's friendly and sincere manner and he has treasured the memory of that incident ever since.

From April, 1933 to April, 1939, Conrad had resided in England, had worked in England, and had gradually come to love this country, this second homeland, very deeply. During this period Conrad decided to renounce his German citizenship and he made formal application for British citizenship through the British Home Office. After the routine clerical processing had been completed and the necessary waiting period had elapsed, Conrad was notified on April 5, 1939, that his application had been approved. So, on that date, Conrad received his British citizenship in a brief but emotional ceremony at one of the government offices in London. Conrad and Lily celebrated the occasion with a quiet dinner at home with a few good friends. The guests all joined in drinking a champagne toast to the new British citizen.

Veidt spent a considerable portion of 1938 on location in France, where he starred in two unusual French films: *Storm over Asia* and *The Chessplayer*. It happened this way. Alexander Korda and Veidt had been searching for quite some time for a suitable story for Veidt's next film. Among the many subjects that were discussed as possibilities were stories about two important European personages. One was Alfred Nobel, the Swedish inventor of dynamite. The other was Jean Henri Dunant, the

2. *Tall, Dark and Gruesome*, by Christopher Lee. W.H. Allen Co., 1977.

Swiss founder of the Red Cross. Another possibility mentioned was that Veidt might portray the life and work of a great doctor. All three subjects appealed greatly to Veidt. Korda suggested that Veidt go to Vienna to meet with the famed psychoanalyst, Professor Sigmund Freud, and discuss with him the details of a screenplay about a doctor. Veidt agreed.

Arrangements were made and Veidt left England for Austria, with a brief stop-over in Paris. While in Paris, however, Veidt happened to meet Richard Oswald, his old friend and former producer/director in many films. Oswald was delighted to see Veidt and took this occasion to offer him a leading role in Oswald's current cinema production. After hearing more about the proffered role, Veidt was unable to restrain his enthusiasm for the part and he told Oswald that he would arrange for a leave of absence from his British film commitments in order to participate in Oswald's new film *Storm Over Asia*. Thus the original plan for a story-conference with Prof. Freud was temporarily shelved and Veidt soon began work in the RIO film studio in Paris.

As a rule movie re-makes are rarely the equal of the original film, and *Storm Over Asia* was no exception. In 1928, the Russian master director



Director/producer Richard Oswald selected Veidt to star in his 1938 French-made adventure film *Storm Over Asia*. Veidt's co-star was Madeleine Robinson (right) in this fascinating story about an attempt to build an empire in Mongolia.

V.I. Pudovkin created a silent classic of that title. In 1938, Oswald based his sound film adaptation rather loosely on Pudovkin's film. Oswald directed the film and co-authored the screenplay. The result, while interesting and with excellent character development, did not compare with its predecessor. Although not an artistic triumph, the film was an entertaining adventure melodrama and it was also a commercial success.

The film begins with a fascinating premise: an Oriental prince attempts to build an empire in Mongolia. But Oswald's screenplay fails to fulfill that initial expectation. The performances by the two leading players, Veidt (as Eric Keith) and Sessue Hayakawa (as Prince Ling), were the main bright spots in the film. Also featured and providing an enchanting romantic interest was the talented and pretty French actress Madeleine Robinson.

After completing his role in *Storm Over Asia*, Conrad returned to England and resumed his work at the Korda studios. Although Oswald and Veidt didn't know it at the time, their completion of the film *Storm Over Asia* signaled the end of a remarkable film-making association between them. Oswald and Veidt had an informal understanding to work with each other whenever possible. This understanding was based more on a handshake between them than on rigid legal contracts. Because of this cordial working relationship, with mutual trust and respect, Oswald was able to produce or direct twenty-two films in which Veidt was starred or featured during the period 1917 through 1938. Veidt liked working for Oswald and knew that Oswald would assign him to interesting and challenging roles in better-than-average productions. Oswald recognized Veidt's unique acting ability and believed that any film that starred Veidt would probably be an artistic and commercial success. But after 1938 Oswald and Veidt never again had the opportunity to work together on a new film. Veidt had only a very few more years to live and Oswald's extraordinary film-making career was in a noticeable decline.

Later in 1938, Conrad received another offer of a role from the French film industry. This time it was the Vega Film Company and the film was the period romance *The Chessplayer*.

This motion picture was based loosely on two sources: the real-life exploits of the legendary Baron Wolfgang von Kempelen of Germany in the 18th Century, and also on the novel *The Chessplayer of Vilna* by French author H. Dupuy-Mazuel.

Baron von Kempelen allegedly designed and built a chess-playing robot.

In approximately 1769 the baron introduced his sensational automaton chessplayer on a tour of the larger cities in Germany. The robot was of human proportions and resembled a man and was clothed Turkish-style. The robot was called simply "The Turk." The Turk sat behind a large wooden box which had two large compartments. The top of the box had a large inlaid chessboard on it, complete with chessmen of a special design. The Turk would challenge all comers to play him a game of chess, and the Turk would almost always emerge victorious. Under the chessboard and inside the box was a complex series of springs, gears, pulleys, levers, wheels, pinions, chain linkage and other impressive-looking machinery. The baron would not allow anyone to examine the inside of the box or the automaton itself closely but would merely permit the public a quick glimpse from several feet away. The baron and his Turk chessplayer were a huge sensation at the time and were very popular when exhibited on tour throughout Europe and America.

It is very strange but there is an unexplainable side to human nature that leads us to believe in such wondrous and amazing things as this chessplaying robot, even though our brains tell us that this just can not be! At any rate, it was many years before it was discovered, to many a person's chagrin, that the baron and his Turkish robotic chessplayer were in fact a gigantic hoax, and that in reality the baron employed a midget to conceal himself in the interior of the so-called automaton. The midget actually did the chessplaying. It has been reported that thousands of persons were taken in by the fantastic exhibit, among them Edgar Allan Poe, the noted American writer, and many other famous and important personages of the day.

Of course, in our day and age there really are chessplaying machines, controlled by computers, which are programmed to play all comers and which do defeat most of their opponents of the beginner and intermediate skill levels, but which usually cannot triumph over the chess grandmasters of the world.

But I digress. To return to the film itself, Veidt played the main role of Baron von Kempelen with considerable elan and artistry. His co-star was the excellent and veteran French actress, Francoise Rosay, and also featured in supporting roles were the able Edmunde Guy and Micheline Francey. Jean Dreville did a fine job of directing this totally fascinating film.

The plot concerns Baron von Kempelen, his life-sized robots, the struggle



for Polish independence, and a romance between a young Polish patriot and a young woman for whom Kempelen is the guardian. All this, plus a fascinating glimpse of the Russian court life and intrigues during the reign of Catherine the Great.

Baron Kempelen, residing in Vilna, has a workshop where he manufactures life-sized robots of many types. One of his most famous robots is the Turk, a robot which allegedly plays chess against all opponents. The empress, Catherine, suspects Kempelen of harboring the Polish patriot and she orders a search of his workshop and home. Kempelen hides the young man inside the chess-playing robot in an effort to smuggle him out of the country. The empress realizes what is going on and orders Kempelen to bring the Turk to St. Petersburg so that she may play chess against the robot.

During their chess game Catherine feigns displeasure with the robot and decides the robot must be punished. Before this order can be carried out, Kempelen changes places with the young man inside. The young man and his sweetheart manage to escape from Russia, while Kempelen, inside the robot, is carried to the place of execution by firing squad.



A rare photo from the 1938 French film *The Chessplayer*, a fine period fantasy about an inventor of robots. In this still, on the left we see Françoise Rosay as the Russian empress, Catherine the Great. In the center is Veidt, as the ingenious maker of the robots, Baron Kempelen. On the right is the robotic chessplayer of the title.

Catherine's soldiers fire a fusillade at the Turk. The soldiers then drag Kempelen out of the robot onto the ground.

The final scene presents a highly dramatic and haunting tableau. The Baron Kempelen lies dying in the snow beside one of his talking, life-sized mechanical men. As Kempelen expires, the automaton keeps repeating in a monotone the same phrase: "The baron is a bizarre person ... bizarre ... bizarre ... bizarre."

Veidt is superb as the inventor-baron who sacrifices himself so nobly. This film offers Veidt one of his best and most unusual roles. As evidence of the film's considerable merit, it was cited at the 1938 Biennale of Venice film festival.

There is an arresting scene that shows a Russian officer being surrounded by a circle of Baron Kempelen's robot soldiers. As the officer tries desperately to escape from the ring of automatons which relentlessly closes in on him, he is stabbed to death by the robots.

One review of this film stated: "Veidt's performance has all the magnetism and subtlety that we expect of him."

Incidentally, Conrad enjoyed the experience of making *Storm Over Asia* and *The Chessplayer* at French film studios. The working schedule in operation there is quite different from the German, English, and American film studio's scheduling. Being a rather later riser in the morning, Conrad was pleased to learn that the French studios don't require their actors to be on the set before noon and the work is usually over before eight p.m. In sharp contrast, Hollywood studios begin their filming at six or seven a.m.! Conrad was quick to point out, though, that the French directors and their film crews managed to get a great deal of work accomplished in their brief time on the set; as much work as their counterparts from other countries.

One of Conrad's best films was the imaginative and thrilling Korda production *The Thief of Bagdad*. Probably the best Arabian Nights fantasy-adventure motion picture ever made, this Technicolor spectacle was directed by Michael Powell and Ludwig Berger. Alexander Korda had purchased the screen rights to this story from movie legend Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., who had starred in the original silent film of the same title in 1924. Korda began filming this major production at his Denham Studios in early 1939 and had completed most of the footage when World War II broke out. Korda had planned to take his cast and crew to Africa for location shots for the concluding outdoor scenes but the war made this

impossible. Korda chose instead the United States, with the Grand Canyon, the Painted Desert, and Bryce Canyon in the American West and Southwest as the sites for the outdoor scenes. His choice was an excellent one and some extremely impressive scenery was filmed therewith.

This delay caused the film to be two years in the making and greatly increased the expenditures on the film, but the result was well worth it. The script was excellent, the cast was marvelous, and the direction was expertly handled with a fine flair. Veidt played the part of the evil magician, Jaffar. Veidt gave a subtlety and depth to his characterization that was wonderful to see. The excellent juvenile actor from India, Sabu, played the young thief of the title, who helps the deposed caliph (John Justin) regain his royal position by thwarting the diabolical schemes of the sinister grand vizier, Jaffar. June Duprez is the beautiful Princess of



In the remarkable Arabian Nights fantasy film of 1940, *The Thief of Bagdad*, Veidt (at right) was cast as the evil Jaffar, the Grand Vizier, who aspires to the throne. Miles Malleon (left) not only portrayed the aged sultan in the film, but also wrote the excellent dialogue for this fascinating film.



Conrad gave a remarkable performance as the evil Grand Vizier Jaffar in the magnificent 1940 fantasy film *The Thief of Bagdad*.

Basra and Miles Malleon not only played the role of the old Sultan but also wrote the very fine screenplay as well. In the dual role of Halima and the Silver Mechanical Doll was the talented actress Mary Morris.

For a review of Veidt's work in this film, let me quote an excerpt from the review of film critic John Stanley in his column in the *San Francisco Chronicle*: "And German actor Conrad Veidt was never more superbly villainous than as Grand Vizier Jaffar, who transforms Sabu into a mongrel dog; conjures up stormy seas; turns a mechanical horse into a living creature that gallops across the sky; and casts sundry evil spells in his attempt to possess the princess for himself."

The film won three Academy Awards: for art direction/sets; for special effects; and for cinematography. The Technicolor photography added considerably to the beautiful effect of the film, and the incredible special effects raised the film far above the ordinary fantasy motion pictures. This motion picture was most deserving of the "Oscars" it received.

This super production was well received and appreciated by young and old alike and did very well at the box offices. *The Thief of Bagdad* was possibly the film that best captured the spirit and atmosphere of the Arabian Nights.

Or, as George MacDonald Fraser states in his superb book: "The film *The Thief of Bagdad* is, for me, the most brilliant fairytale ever put on the screen!"<sup>3</sup>

At this time Conrad and Lily were living in a lovely house on Denham Green Lane in Buckinghamshire, the county just northwest of London. The house was situated on a small hill and was only about five blocks from the Denham film studios. The house was surrounded by a large grassy lawn, with several tall pine trees here and there, and with a wishing well nearby. Inside, the house had beautiful cathedral ceilings, with massive oaken beams. There were also large fireplaces in the rooms.

When the weather was fair Conrad liked to leave the house at seven a.m. and walk down the hill to the studio and be there early for work. The shooting started at eight a.m. but this allowed Conrad time to have his make-up applied and to have his turban wound around his head properly for his scenes as the wicked magician, Jaffar.

During the filming of *The Thief of Bagdad*, Conrad's daughter Viola came to the studio at the invitation of her famous father, and she was shown around the set and introduced to all members of the cast and to the director and members of the film crew. Viola was a pretty girl of about fifteen years at this time and she was thrilled to meet the handsome male lead, John Justin, and the beautiful feminine star of the film, June Duprez, just as any teenager would. Viola was shown around the studio set and some of the location sites and then stayed also to have lunch with her doting father, and with other members of the cast. The first day was a red-letter day, exciting and memorable for Viola.

Viola spent several days thereafter visiting the studio each morning at around ten o'clock, while her father was working. She was absolutely

3. *The Hollywood History of the World*, by George MacDonald Fraser. William Morrow Co., 1988.

fascinated by the long turban that her father was wearing as the cunning magician, Jaffar, and she loved to watch the procedure as the turban was wound on her father's head prior to that day's shooting. Also while on the set, Sabu attempted to teach Viola how to properly climb on to an elephant's trunk and then be lifted onto the elephant's shoulders and then ride the elephant around the set. Sabu also taught June Duprez this little trick, as she was required to ride the elephant for a scene in the film. Sabu, whose father was an elephant mahout in India, knew how to handle elephants and how to talk to them. However, neither Miss Duprez nor Miss Veidt cared for the uncomfortable and dizzying rides and declined further offers of instruction in the art of elephant riding and handling.

At about this time an incident occurred which Viola laughingly related to me, but which was most disconcerting and unpleasant to her father and herself when it happened.

Conrad, knowing how much Viola loved animals, asked her if she would like to go to the zoo with him. To which Viola gave an eager affirmative reply. On arrival at the zoo, Viola first went to the petting zoo section containing young animals. There Viola was able to cuddle and pet the young animals of many species. She and her father then walked over to the section containing the apes. While admiring the large gorilla in one cage, Conrad and Viola were soon surrounded by a crowd of movie fans who had recognized Conrad and were clamoring for his autograph.

Conrad obliged, and while standing quite near the gorilla's cage, he signed a score of autographs. During this autograph-signing session the male gorilla became quite upset, either because he did not like the noise the crowd was making or because he felt his territory was being threatened. Whatever the reason, the gorilla suddenly came very close to the bars of his cage and, taking careful aim, urinated directly at Conrad and Viola, spraying them and several other unlucky bystanders.

Amid much yelling and screaming, Conrad and Viola immediately ran to the zoo exit, hurried over to their car and sped home to Denham. Even with the car's top down and the windows open, they could not escape the strong stench of urine on their clothing. On their arrival home the malodorous duo was met by Lily, who was quite concerned at first by the messy plight of her husband and her stepdaughter. On learning the details of the incident, however, Lily was unable to suppress her laughter.

I know that many devoted and loyal Veidt fans may object to the inclusion of the zoo anecdote in this biography. They may argue that the

incident is gross and vulgar and that it defames Veidt's memory. I too am a devoted follower of Veidt's life and career, and I think that one must be able to see and appreciate the human and sometimes comical aspects of Conrad Veidt's life. Veidt had his foibles, his occasional lapses of good judgment, and his misfortunes, just like the rest of us. While Conrad was noticeably chagrined at the time of the incident, he was able to laugh at himself later by his recounting of the tale among his circle of friends. Conrad was in no way a pompous or stuffed-shirt type of person.

Another favorite attraction during Viola's London visit was Madame Tussaud's famous wax museum. Viola was properly frightened by the Chamber of Horrors there, especially the exhibit of Marie Antoinette in which the doomed Queen's head fell, under the axe of the hooded executioner, when the wax figures were activated.

In another section of the wax museum, the British Royal family was displayed in large numbers. On seeing the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret on exhibit, Viola excitedly told her father that she and Lily had seen the real-life princesses together with their grandmother, Queen Mary, a few days before while shopping at Selfridge's department store.

In a corner far removed from the main exhibit of the British royal family, there were figures of the Duke of Windsor and his bride, Wallis Simpson, in her blue wedding dress. Conrad mentioned to Lily that even in a wax museum, these two figures were ostracized by the British royal house.

Also during Viola's visit to England that summer there was an amusing incident with a large, noisy owl. It seems that outside the bedrooms occupied by Lily and Viola there was a large pine tree inhabited by a large owl. Each night the owl would hoot loudly, disturbing their sleep. Conrad's bedroom was located on the other side of the house and he was not disturbed by the owl's nocturnal activities. At any rate, the owl's hooting and screeching became tiresome and very annoying to Lily and Viola, so the next time they were in London on a shopping trip they decided, on a sudden whim, to stop in Woolworth's store and purchase two small toy cap pistols, and a sufficient supply of the caps to be fired. Returning home, they found that Conrad was quite tired after a long and busy day of shooting scenes at the studio. He retired to bed rather early that evening. Because of this, Lily and Viola forgot to mention to Conrad the problem of the troublesome owl, and the cap pistols they had bought.

Late that night, when the owl again woke Lily and Viola, the two ladies



Lily and Conrad are shown here after attending a film premiere in Hollywood, circa 1941.

took up their weapons and began blazing away out the window of Viola's room, and laughing and giggling to themselves. At the same time Viola's little Sealyham terrier, Mackie, was barking furiously at the commotion. At this point Conrad appeared in the doorway to stare in disbelief at the scene: his wife and daughter, in their nightgowns, firing blanks into the night and giggling and laughing uproariously, while the family terrier was barking madly and jumping up and down in a frenzy.

After things finally calmed down, and the situation was explained, Conrad admitted that he had been just about to telephone the police for assistance. Quite often thereafter Conrad would playfully tease Lily and Viola about the "infamous owl incident."

One odd bit of cinema anecdote concerns the filming of *The Thief of Bagdad*, and the way the directorial duties were handled. Originally, Ludwig Berger had been assigned as the sole director. Berger was a veteran director who had done some great work in the 1920s and 1930s in Germany, the U.S., and other countries (including directing Veidt in an interesting German silent film of 1920, *Der Richter von Zalamea*). There was a basic disagreement between producer Korda and director Berger, however, in their individual concepts of the type of film to be made.



Berger had a narrow, old-fashioned, black and white film in mind, whereas Korda saw the project as a spectacular, Technicolor production, full of thrilling special effects and filmed on an epic scale. When small-scale location sets, inside the limited-area Denham studios were shown to Korda by Berger, Korda gave orders to tear them down and start anew. Alexander Korda then chose his brother, Vincent, for the job, giving him a free hand to design and build some magnificent new outdoor sets, regardless of the rapidly mounting production costs. Korda felt that Berger couldn't give him the magnitude of spectacle he wanted. As a result, Korda requested that Berger withdraw from the film in favor of another director of Korda's choice. Berger flatly refused to do so, citing his contract in support of his position. Korda reluctantly allowed Berger to stay on as a co-director but gave Berger a minor share in the direction of the film.

At this point Korda chose Michael Powell (whose cinematic experience was considerable and whose work was quite familiar to Korda) as a co-director of *The Thief of Bagdad*. He later also hired Tim Whelan for additional directorial support. In addition, when the production unit went on location to the United States for the final outdoor scenes, much of the direction was entrusted to William Cameron Menzies and to Korda's younger brother, Zoltan Korda.

Thus we have a total of five directors who had varying amounts of control over the filming of this marvelous photoplay! While they all shared directorial duties, they did not all share in the screen credits. Zoltan Korda and William Cameron Menzies were not mentioned in the screen credits, while Messrs. Berger, Powell, and Whelan were officially so cited. In spite of this "too many cooks" type of direction, the film turned out to be a fabulous success, both commercially and artistically. The film was a stunning visual spectacle and was a delight for moviegoers of all ages.

Three members of the very talented Korda family were involved in the production of this incomparable film. First and foremost was the eldest brother, Alexander Korda, who produced and coordinated the whole production. Zoltan Korda, the middle brother, had an important share of the directorial responsibility, while youngest brother, Vincent Korda, was in charge of the art direction. Quite a creative and artistic family, the Kordas.

*The Thief of Bagdad* was an absolutely stunning production. Producer



On the set of the superb Arabian Nights fantasy film of 1939, *The Thief of Bagdad*, we see Conrad studying his script in the company of the director, Michael Powell, and the lovely co-star, June Duprez.

Alexander Korda refused to stint on the budget or to cut corners to save money. His aim was to give this film the very best production support possible, and the resulting film bears out his success in this endeavor.

The very fine musical score by Miklos Rozsa had the power to bring the sights and sounds of the Arabian Nights to life. He deserves much credit for this score.

It might be mentioned here that the role of the beautiful Princess of Basra had originally been slated for Vivien Leigh. But Miss Leigh decided on a rather sudden caprice, just before filming was to begin, to leave England for Hollywood. She was replaced, on Korda's orders, with the equally lovely June Duprez, she of the beautiful almond eyes.

Especially noteworthy were the fabulous special effects in this film. Such marvels as the flying horse; the magic carpet; the Dancing Doll with six arms (with a dagger concealed in one hand) whose embrace was deadly; and the huge Djinn that came out of a bottle; the magical crossbow, etc. All were particularly well done. They all produced thrills and expressions of amazement from the audiences.

The role of the Dancing Doll was portrayed by Mary Morris, the very talented film actress who also was active in British theater and television. In a letter she wrote to me in 1988, Miss Morris said that when she participated in *The Thief of Bagdad* in the late 1930s, she was a shy and nervous young thing. She felt absolutely awed to be in the presence of the world-famous Conrad Veidt. She soon learned, however, that Conrad was as concerned for the other members of the cast as he was for himself; his gentleness and humor helped Miss Morris and the other actors in their roles. Once, just before Mary was to perform as the mechanical doll with six arms, Conrad noticed that she appeared to be quite nervous and tense. Conrad came very close and, with the naughtiest twinkle in his eyes, he whispered in a mock risque tone, "Mary, just think what a wonderful night you could have with six arms!" The plan worked—Miss Morris laughed at Conrad's racy little joke, then relaxed and proceeded to do the required scene perfectly, with no re-takes.

Mary Morris also shared this memory: "One day Conrad's daughter, Viola, came to the studio to observe her father during the filming. Conrad called me over especially to meet Viola. After a pleasant conversation, I asked them if they would mind if I took a photograph of them. Conrad jokingly said there would be no objection as long as I paid him his 'usual fee for posing for publicity shots.' I then took two snapshots. Conrad was in his Jaffar costume, turban and all. Viola, although only fourteen at the time, appeared to be at least eighteen or nineteen years old. She looked quite attractive wearing a dark jacket and skirt and with her hair in a very becoming adult-style hairdo. Since then I have treasured those two photographs I took on that day in 1939 of the great actor and his daughter. Unfortunately, I never had another opportunity to work with Conrad on a film. He was a truly great actor and a wonderful person."

In his highly favorable review of *The Thief of Bagdad*, Jeffrey Richards, film critic for the British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* described Veidt's performance in this film as follows: "But the film is dominated by Conrad Veidt, whose black-clad necromancer is a creation of true demonic

power. Whether summoning up storms, inflicting blindness, courting his captive princess, or pouring words of honeyed poison into trusting ears, his is a mesmerizing performance."

As this motion picture was being produced, Conrad and Lily were thoroughly enjoying Viola's company during her annual visit from Switzerland. And of course, Viola was having the time of her life, being with the father she loved so much, and with her stepmother whom she had come to love too. Also, Viola immensely enjoyed the visits to the film studio to watch the motion picture being produced. However, Conrad found it difficult to hide his concern over Viola's safety in England, with the increasingly dangerous world situation looming on the horizon. Conrad was well aware that British schoolchildren from the London urban area were being evacuated to the countryside and that the British armed forces had been placed on alert status.

Conrad had a very good friend who was a senior officer in the British military forces. This officer was a military aide to Winston Churchill and, as such, was well aware of the worsening international situation between England and Germany. When he notified Conrad that there would probably be a war within the next few days, Conrad immediately advised Viola that they would have to cut short her vacation in England.

In explaining this to Viola, Conrad reached out and held Viola's hand and said to her, "Fuchsi, we must all help each other now. Help me by being brave. I did not know until yesterday how bad the political situation was. Knowing that you are safe will make it easier for me. Please give me the peace of mind of knowing that you are safe, won't you? You will see, it won't be long until we can be together again." Both Conrad and Viola were crying by this time.

Much as he hated to say goodbye and to part, Conrad knew that Viola would be much safer with her mother in neutral Switzerland than in England, with Hitler threatening to unleash his dreaded Luftwaffe on English targets and eventually to invade England. So arrangements were made for Viola to leave London by train for Dover; then across the English Channel on the ferryboat to Calais, France; then to Paris and on to Geneva and home by train. Conrad arranged for his trusted secretary, a Miss Smith (who had been working for Conrad for many years and who took care of answering his mountain of fan mail) to escort Viola to Geneva from London.

Viola told me recently that on that unhappy day in late August, 1939,

saying goodbye was especially difficult. With the war looming over all human activities, Conrad, Lily, and Viola each wondered and worried about what tomorrow would bring. Each one pretended to be optimistic about the future, although each was secretly convinced that the war would be a long and horrible one.

Viola's departure was as follows, in Viola's own words: "First, before leaving Daddy's home, Lily gave me a warm hug and a kiss and handed me a little note, which said, 'We will soon be together again, dear Viola. Please do what Daddy says, darling. Love, Lily.' Then Daddy drove with me to the station and every once in a while he reached out and held my hand. At the station, I boarded the train for Dover. Daddy and I held hands through the open window. Several times Daddy took his monocle out and cleaned it with his handkerchief. I could see that he was crying. I was crying, too. At this moment people began crowding around Daddy, requesting autographs. Though normally extremely cooperative with his fans, at this time Daddy turned to the fans and said softly, 'Not now, please. I am saying goodbye to my little daughter.' Daddy and I held hands until the train started to move. Then Daddy ran beside the train, waving to me, until there was no more room to run on the platform. I rode on to Dover, Paris, and finally Geneva. Daddy returned to his home, and we never saw each other again."

In addition to writing letters to her father, Viola also corresponded with her maternal grandmother in Berlin, Frau Radke. The letters Viola received in return from Germany were so heavily censored by the German authorities that they looked like some sort of fancy lace, with so many cut-outs! Almost every fourth word was censored.

On September 3, 1939, the filming of *The Thief of Bagdad* at Denham Studios was interrupted by a loud siren. All members of the production staff, the cast, and the film crew were startled by the totally unexpected air raid siren. Everyone, including the actors still in their Arabian Nights costumes, was directed to a large concrete coal bunker nearby, which had to serve as an impromptu air raid shelter.

While waiting there for the "all-clear" signal to sound, they listened intently to a radio announcement from Prime Minister Chamberlain, who solemnly stated that hostilities had begun between Great Britain and Germany. Everyone there was depressed by the news, both saddened and fearful of what the future would bring to their lives and to their country. Veidt, a native of Germany but now a citizen of England, was especially

saddened by the onset of the war. He was concerned by the thought of casualties and misery and destruction that would befall *both* Germany and England. When the "all-clear" finally sounded, all cast and film crew members, now noticeably quiet and grave, returned to the studio set to complete the day's filming.

With the commencement of hostilities between Germany and his new homeland, Conrad had no problems with divided loyalties. He gave his full support and loyalty to Great Britain. He was tireless in his efforts to raise funds for Britain, both from his personal fortune, and from the profits accruing from his films. Also much of his salary was donated to British War Relief. It was obvious that he felt himself truly a British citizen. Veidt gave much of his free time, doing benefit appearances and donating money to British charity and the war effort.

Conrad was so grateful to Great Britain for the opportunity to become a British citizen and to find productive work and an artistic outlet in his chosen career, the cinema and the stage, that when World War II came he donated more money to England's wartime financial needs than most actors and actresses who were born and raised in England! Perhaps this was because he had personal knowledge of the situation in Germany and could readily appreciate the vast difference in personal freedom and artistic latitude between Hitler's Germany and that of his newly-adopted homeland, England.

At about this time Conrad was offered a starring role in a motion picture that sounds fascinating. This was the Alexander Korda production *The Conjuror*. Veidt was cast as a secret agent in Burma during World War II, and also co-starred was the young and talented actor from India, Sabu. London Films was scheduled to go into production on this motion picture in early 1940, but Korda decided to shelve this cinema indefinitely. I have not been able to ascertain what caused the discontinuance of this film.

In 1940, Veidt was interviewed by a feature writer for a leading British movie magazine. Veidt was asked if he had any roles in mind that he would like to portray. Conrad replied that he was extremely impressed with a recent, prestigious American film, *The Life of Emile Zola*, which had been directed by Conrad's good friend (and former contemporary from the old Reinhardt Theater) William Dieterle. Paul Muni had given a stellar performance as Zola. Conrad stated that he would like very much to take part in a quality production of a filmed biography of some

important historical figure. With Veidt's tremendous talents, I'm sure his performance would have been a remarkable achievement. But this was never to be, and Conrad went on playing Nazi officers, spies, suave villains, etc. I don't mean to imply that these latter performances by Veidt were not up to his usual standards. They were. But Veidt was capable of so much more, if given the proper role in a first class production.

In support of this viewpoint of mine is an article written by British newspaper columnist and critic, Herbert Cole. In 1940, Cole wrote an article about Veidt in which he appealed to world film producers to find more suitable motion picture roles for Veidt. Cole felt that the film producers were wasting Veidt's extraordinary talents by starring him in routine spy films. Cole wrote: "Veidt definitely needs characters on a grander scale, touching far greater heights and depths. Veidt is a man who is built by nature to petrify kings and emperors with a look, and to rot the marrow in their bones with a sibilant whisper!"

British writer and film critic John Gammie amplified this viewpoint in an article which he called "An Appreciation of Conrad Veidt—Great Actor." Gammie had this to say: "I regard Conrad Veidt as one of the half-dozen leading exponents of his art in the world, and if pressed to discriminate among them, I would probably put him in front of most of the others!"

Conrad wanted to do a film that would be intellectually stimulating both to himself and to the audiences. He wanted a screenplay that would make people think, and not just entertain them with stories of adventure or romance or mystery. He wanted screenplays that concerned matters of importance in the lives of people, not merely escapist trifles.

Another example of what Veidt was seeking came out of Hollywood in 1940. This was *The Grapes of Wrath*, the marvelous film that turned a sympathetic eye on the desperate plight of the displaced families from the American dustbowl region of the 1930s. Veidt admired not only the remarkably fine acting of the entire cast and the proficient direction of John Ford, but he was greatly impressed with the original novel by John Steinbeck and the emotionally moving screenplay by Nunnally Johnson. Veidt felt this was a memorable film achievement because of the social significance it contained. Veidt never found the right novel or screenplay that he wanted to direct or star in, at this late point in his career.

Conrad's next film was the very exciting British film, *Contraband* (released in the U.S. as *Blackout*) of 1940. This thriller told the story of a

Danish Merchant Mariner, Captain Andersen (Veidt) who leaves his ship while it is tied up at a British contraband port, to follow a beautiful and mysterious woman passenger (Valerie Hobson) who has stolen a document from his ship. The woman turns out to be a British intelligence agent, and dramatic events then happen in quick succession as the sea captain and the spy run into trouble ashore, in their battle against German espionage agents. Michael Powell directed this marvelous well-paced thriller for United Artists, which was released in April, 1940.

The cast also included Esmond Knight, Hay Petrie, and Raymond Lovell, each of whom gave an excellent performance. The cast, the director, and the scenario all managed to convey admirably a spirit of mystery and suspense in this film. The film had considerable suspense and moved along at an excellent pace. This motion picture was a fine example of the type of taut, exciting thriller of the spy or crime genre which the British filmmakers do so well.

There are many exciting moments in this Hitchcockian-style suspense and action film but one scene has stayed in my memory. Valerie Hobson, as the heroine, is required to cross over a high, narrow steel girder, during the blackout, while attempting to escape from the enemy agents. Her dangerous crossing in the dark was edge-of-the-seat viewing for audiences of this film.

Incidentally, this film was the first British film to be completed after the start of hostilities and it pictured the quiet heroism of the British at war. It also showed London under actual blackout conditions. This was during the dark, discouraging early days of the war when things were going very badly for England and the Allies, and Germany and her Axis partners were enjoying huge military and political successes.

Before director Michael Powell began the actual shooting of the film he gave Conrad a copy of the script so Conrad could familiarize himself with the role of the ship's captain that he would be portraying. Conrad read the script through and noticed, to his surprise and delight, that he would not be killed off in the story and that he, for a welcome change, would win the pretty girl at the film's end. Conrad had become so used to being the villain who is shot to death, or hanged, or fatally stabbed, or poisoned, or otherwise permanently disposed of in the final scenes, that he couldn't quite believe the happy ending for his character in this film. Conrad therefore approached director Powell and challenged him to a wager about the final outcome for Captain Andersen: "Mike, I'll bet that you'll



have them write in another ending so that when Valerie and I finally sail away to freedom, the ship strikes a mine and sinks!" Michael Powell laughingly accepted. As viewers of the highly entertaining film now know, the film followed the original "happy ending" scenario and Conrad lost the wager but won the girl.

An interesting bit of cinema trivia about the Veidt film *Contraband* might be added here. As the shooting of this film was being completed, there was very small part in it for a hat-check girl in a nightclub scene where Veidt is seen with the feminine lead. This was the film debut of a young actress who later became very famous, and justly so, for her talent and her beauty. I refer to the marvelous English actress Deborah Kerr. Unfortunately, at the whim of the film editors, who trimmed the film down to its final length, this particular scene was cut and so Miss Kerr was not seen in the final version.

Another interesting bit of cinema trivia concerns the exhibition of the film *Contraband* in the U.S. The manager of the Globe Theater in New York City decided to use a novel plan to attract attention and patronage while at the same time benefitting the British war effort. In December, 1940, the Globe Theater advertised the showing there of the exciting film *Blackout*. The advertisement also stated that patrons could gain admission to see this film either by paying cash, as usual, or by turning in a firearm of any type. The purpose was to obtain weapons to be sent to England for use by the British Home Guard. This promotional scheme was quite successful. Because of the publicity, patronage at the theater was heavy during the several days that *Blackout* was shown. In addition to the large cash receipts there was also a huge number of guns turned in, which were later shipped to the British War Office for proper disposition to military personnel in Great Britain. When Conrad was informed of this event he was greatly pleased at the initiative and the spirit of international cooperation and wartime assistance to England displayed by the management of the Globe Theater.

Two of Veidt's several fine British films, namely *The Spy in Black* and *Contraband*, were the product of the remarkable working relationship between Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. Powell and Pressburger's collaboration was so mutually dependent, so mutually creative, and so harmonious, that they often shared all the producing, directing, and screenwriting duties between themselves. The result of their collaboration was usually (as in the case of *The Spy in Black* and

*Contraband*) original and intriguing screenplays, exceptional direction, and superb performances by the cast.

Film critic Sarah Lockerie, in her favorable review of the film *Contraband* in 1940, stated that Veidt's acting was superb. She further commented that "Conrad Veidt can pack more menace into a lifted eyebrow than less talented men can into a lifted club!"

At about this time, Conrad received confidential information from a German friend of his who worked in the German Foreign Office on Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin. This friend notified Conrad that he had seen Veidt's name on a copy of the Gestapo's official arrest list (called *Sonderfahndungsliste* in German). Veidt's name was included among those British citizens who would be arrested, interrogated, and imprisoned as soon as Germany had successfully invaded and conquered England. Veidt was considered an enemy of the German Third Reich.

The year was 1940, and the threat of a German invasion of Great Britain was a very real and imminent possibility and Veidt did not take the situation lightly. The seemingly invincible German armed forces had rolled quickly through France, Belgium, and the Netherlands in a classic example of the "Blitzkrieg," the lightning war. America was still neutral in 1940, and England stood alone to face the expected Teutonic onslaught.

A fortuitous opportunity then presented itself to Veidt, and he seized the chance. The executive producer of British National Films asked Veidt if he would go to America to assist in the distribution of the film *Contraband*. Veidt accepted the assignment on condition that his wife, Lily, could accompany him. This was agreed to and arrangements were completed accordingly.

As the Christmas holiday season approached, in 1940, Conrad donated approximately \$1600 (roughly £400 British pounds) for the purpose of providing Christmas gifts to the poor children of London. Although Conrad was living in Beverly Hills by then, far from the dangers and hardships of the British people in their besieged and threatened position only a few miles across the Channel from a belligerent Germany, he never forgot his second homeland, England. This was during the dreadful Battle of Britain, when the German Luftwaffe was bombing London so severely in their Blitz attack. This donation was a typical example of Conrad's thoughtfulness. No one else in Great Britain, to the best of my knowledge, had such a kindly thought for the children during a particularly terrible and trying time.

Conrad conceived the idea of donating the money, through his attorneys in London, to purchase two thousand one-pound cans of candy; two thousand large packets of chocolate; and one thousand wrapped envelopes containing presents of British currency. His plan was that these five thousand gift packets would be distributed, at Christmastime, to children from poor and needy families at various air raid shelters in the London area.

The Air Raid Shelter marshal of the Cannonbury Tube Shelter wrote a letter to Conrad to thank him for his gifts. Excerpts from that letter are as follows: "On behalf of this shelter, we ask you to please convey to Mr. Conrad Veidt our heartfelt thanks for his benevolence in providing us with sixty-four parcels and thirty-two envelopes for distribution among the children in this shelter. Your generous thought for the London children is on everybody's lips and I am proud and happy to have had the privilege of distributing these presents for you and Mrs. Veidt. It is significant to note that as far as is known to me, you are the only member of the Theatrical Profession who had the thought to send Christmas presents to the London children."

## 22

### Much Gossip About Conrad: Some Truth and Many Lies

IN THE FILM *Dark Journey* there is one scene in which Conrad's character, Baron von Marwitz, is having a romantic tete-a-tete with Vivien Leigh's character, Madeleine Godard, in a restaurant. Conrad asks Vivien, "And have you discovered all the secrets of my dark soul?"

I mention this bit of dialogue from the film script to introduce the heretofore unmentioned subject of the negative side of Conrad's life. Apparently Conrad, like a great many of us, had a secret life; one not widely known by his adoring fans or the general public.

Conrad Veidt has been accused of many things. If one were to believe the many derogatory allegations and malicious gossip written about Veidt, one would probably conclude that he was a womanizing, alcoholic, drug-addicted, pederastic, transvestite, homosexual monster, with no redeeming virtues whatsoever. I won't go into all of the derogatory allegations that have been made against him, because I have seen no incontrovertible proof to support most of them. I would vastly prefer to comply with the ancient Latin precept, "De mortuis nihil nisi bonum" (of the dead, say nothing but good). However, in this age of unforgiving and sensationalistic biographies, I probably should discuss briefly some of the gossip that swirled around Conrad during his lifetime, and two allegations, in particular, about Conrad's "dark and secret soul." I refer to the allegations of bisexuality and use of drugs.

The well-known film historian, David Shipman, in his authoritative book described Veidt's sexual proclivities thusly: "Veidt's friends regarded him as heterosexual when sober and homosexual when drunk."<sup>1</sup>

1. *The Great Movie Stars: The Golden Years*, by David Shipman. Hill and Wang, Publishers, 1981.

As I have pointed out in these pages, Conrad was a product of a home with a strict and undemonstrative father and a doting, loving, generous mother. He then entered a career that placed him in a wildly bohemian atmosphere, the theatrical world, in which most of his co-workers were older persons and many of whom were dissolute, licentious, and immoral in character. A final factor in shaping Conrad's sexuality was likely the period itself. This was the era of 1912 to 1932, which included World War I and the ensuing Weimar Republic. These were highly immoral times, when the predominant attitude was "anything goes."

In rebuttal of the allegation of bisexuality I offer a statement by film director Michael Powell, who directed Veidt in three films and who knew both Conrad and Lily quite well. Powell stated in his marvelously interesting book that: "Conrad Veidt was the most brilliant actor and the most interesting *bisexual* on the German stage!"<sup>2</sup> Powell seemed to make a deliberate point of emphasizing Veidt's normal and respectable sexual nature, as compared with the many homosexual actors then on the stage. Powell also stated that Conrad's marriage with Lily was one of the very happiest marriages that he knew of.

In addition to Michael Powell, several other close friends of Conrad have stated publicly that Conrad and Lily had a truly happy marriage. It was a compatible marriage, they all agreed, in which Conrad and Lily shared a genuine love, a pleasant and affectionate companionship, and respect for each other. In addition, Conrad absolutely adored his daughter, Viola, and that feeling was reciprocated by Viola. In his mature years, at least outwardly, Conrad led an exemplary family life.

The second allegation is that of drug abuse. Conrad's co-star in two films, Elizabeth Bergner, mentioned Conrad's use of drugs in her fascinating autobiography.<sup>3</sup> Miss Bergner related that on one occasion (in 1924 when she and Conrad and Emil Jannings were all co-starred in the film *Nju*) Veidt and Jannings came to her studio dressing room during lunch time. Conrad and Emil had brought some coffee with them, as well as a small package of cocaine. They explained to Elizabeth that "all film stars and stage stars were using cocaine" and urged her to try some. They then showed Elizabeth how the white cocaine powder should be ingested

2. *Bewundert viel und viel gescholten*, by Elizabeth Bergner. C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1978.

3. *A Life in the Movies*, by Michael Powell. Knopf & Co., 1987.

by inhaling some of it themselves. At this point Conrad and Emil offered some to Elizabeth. However, Miss Bergner firmly declined the offer.

It was reportedly during one period of severe melancholy that Conrad was introduced to narcotics. A minor actor, so the report goes, playing in the same stage production as Conrad, befriended him and later offered him some cocaine. Conrad, hoping the drug would help him through each miserable day and night, decided to try some. Conrad learned through his new-found "friend" that drugs such as cocaine, heroin, and morphine were readily obtainable in post-war Berlin. While the drugs did provide some relief to Conrad, he soon came to regret his experimentation with them and the dependency on them that he had incurred. Conrad eventually conquered the drug habit and ceased ingesting narcotics completely.

Many students of Veidt's life (and the lives of other German film stars of those early days) feel strongly that Veidt merely followed the example of the *established* stage and film stars of that period. As Richard Plant, a noted writer and observer of the German scene in the 1920s commented: "Social life became a wild, often desperate attempt to enjoy the passing moment." In those iniquitous days following the watershed ending of World War I, the German artistic set (actors, painters, dancers, musicians, writers, directors, etc.) seemed to be hell-bent on searching for, and experimenting with, all sorts of new sensations and experiences, whether legal or not, healthful or not. These experiences consisted of sexual adventures and excesses (all manner of heterosexual, homosexual, and transvestite affairs, orgies, and pranks) as well as narcotics and alcohol abuse.

Students of the life and career of Veidt believe that Veidt's highly experimental lifestyle in Berlin in the early 1920s was merely a phase that Veidt went through, *and then discarded*, upon his departure from Germany for America in 1926.

Admittedly, Conrad was human, as all of us are. He had his share of human faults and weaknesses. I suspect that in times of loneliness or mental depression Conrad may have over-indulged in his alcoholic consumption. I suspect that in the wild, gross, feverish, self-indulgent period of the 1920s in Berlin, Conrad (as well as many other actors and actresses) experimented with narcotics. I suspect that on rare occasions Conrad may have been unfaithful to his wives. I suspect that the majority of German actors experimented, during that unreal, daredevil atmosphere of lax morals in the 1920s, with various sexual practices that border on the abnormal and perverse by the standards of most people. But these

suspicions are highly conjectural, without sufficient evidence or proof.

There was something highly androgynous about Veidt's film performances. Veidt had what might be called a "beautiful/handsome" face, which was capable of such subtle, sensitive expressions. It seems that Conrad was able to make full use of the "feminine" side of his nature, but never being in any way what we term "effeminate." His body movements were so graceful and elegant. He could convey such sweetness and spirituality, when needed, or such menace and malevolence, with a minimum of gestures. Veidt could change effortlessly from expressing radiant goodness to manifesting absolute evil. His use of his hands and his eyes was so delicate and expressive. This talent of his was especially evident in the dual roles he played, in which his contrasting characterizations were simply amazing. Other actors in similar dual roles needed lots of make-up and costuming but Veidt just used his facial muscles and his intense personality to express the desired emotion.

After viewing one of Conrad's typically evil film roles, a woman moviegoer gave her written comments about Conrad on a film opinion survey questionnaire, as follows: "Conrad Veidt has wicked eyes, a sinister mouth, strange hands and a half-man/half-woman quality about him. His walk is frightening. There is something not quite normal about him. And yet, he was totally fascinating, charming, and appealing to me at the same time!"

I believe that any actor who performed with such dramatic intensity and hypnotic power, as Veidt did, must have been a highly complex person. No one could produce such an astounding variety of acting styles and unique characterizations without having hidden depths to his own nature. In addition, many women filmgoers have stated that they have never seen any man on the screen convey so much eroticism and masculine sexuality as Veidt did. It's no wonder that women flocked to see his films. It's also no wonder that scandalous gossip items were printed and circulated about Veidt, when one considers his magnetic attraction.

In fact, Veidt's alleged bisexuality may have contributed to his marvelous acting ability. The well-known British film critic, Michael Billington, in his excellent book, expresses this syndrome very well.<sup>4</sup> I think it applies to Veidt as well as many other accomplished actors of stage and screen. Billington believed in the theory that "the androgynous bisexual quality invariably underpins great acting."

4. *The Modern Actor*, by Michael Billington. Hamilton Publ. Co., 1973.

Every reader of this book may form an independent opinion and evaluation of Veidt's stage and screen work, in relation to Veidt's alleged bisexuality and his alleged use of drugs. For my part, Veidt's magnificent and unique contributions to the theater and motion picture have earned him a secure place in the minds and hearts of audiences, as well as in the annals of world film history. I firmly believe that Veidt's personal practices, whatever they may have been, do not detract from his distinguished record of performances on stage and screen.

There is scarcely anyone still alive today who knew Veidt well enough to answer these questions and put the allegations to rest. As one film and theater critic once wrote: "No one will ever completely understand Conrad Veidt."



## 23

### His Second Visit to America

IN 1940 CONRAD AND LILY took the prints of his new film *Contraband* to the United States for editing and distribution as *Blackout*. They sailed out of Liverpool on a gloomy overcast day in April aboard the camouflaged and blacked-out liner, the *SS Duchess of Bedford*. Due to the ever-present danger of German submarines, there was no public announcement in the news media of the ship's departure time or place. Conrad and Lily arrived in New York several days later, after an uneventful voyage (although there had been rumors of German submarines being sighted in their area).

*Blackout* was the first film produced by Veidt's own production unit for Anglo-American Films, Inc. Veidt had joined with Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger to form this film company in which he and Powell and Pressburger cooperated in the writing, producing, directing, and acting tasks involved. Michael Powell was the director and co-writer of the screenplay with Emeric Pressburger, and Veidt was the producer and leading actor. The combination of the tremendous talents of these three produced an intelligent script and a suspenseful spy thriller—one of the best of this genre.

The plan was that the film would be edited by studio personnel in New York, and then released in the United States. The releasing of the film in America was to help raise funds for England for the war effort. While in New York for this purpose, Conrad received an unexpected phone call from Hollywood, from the MGM studios. The caller was Louis B. Mayer, the famous head of MGM, who gave Veidt a cordial invitation to take part in the forthcoming anti-Nazi film, *Escape*.

Conrad accepted readily, thinking it would be fine if he could "do a film" while here in the United States. This gave an added impetus to his career, another of the many "lucky breaks" that seemed to happen to Conrad throughout his life.

Conrad arrived by train (no air travel for the acrophobic Herr Veidt) in Hollywood on June 13, 1940, and was immediately rushed to the MGM studios by limousine for a meeting with Mayer. After that cordial and productive conversation, he was rushed over to the MGM wardrobe department for a fitting for his part as the General in *Escape*. It was only four days later that Conrad was working in the film.

Conrad was amazed at how fast things were happening to him here in America: "I was overjoyed at the opportunity to audition for the film *Escape*. I would never have gotten the role or have even been considered for it if I hadn't already been in the United States at that particular moment, because the shooting on the film was to start almost immediately. Coming to America for the purpose of making arrangements for *Contraband* was a stroke of luck for me."

MGM almost spoiled Conrad in their eagerness to sign him to a long-term exclusive contract. MGM offered Veidt many extra benefits and perquisites, in addition to a very generous regular salary. Conrad was



Veidt, as General von Kolb, with Norma Shearer, as the Countess, in the exciting 1940 MGM film *Escape*.

offered chauffeured limousine service to and from his home and the studio; a considerable degree of choice and control of future film roles; the opportunity to read the script of a proposed new film well in advance and give his opinion on the acceptability of the role; and several other similar privileges that often go with Hollywood stardom.

In spite of Conrad's protests, MGM insisted that Conrad utilize a dressing room suite befitting a star, consisting of three connecting rooms. Actually, they were Greta Garbo's former dressing rooms.

Veidt politely declined, with thanks, the offered inducements, however, stating that such exceedingly liberal considerations would not be necessary. He did, however, make one simple request: "You must guarantee, please, that I will be able to obtain my favorite 'Berliner Weisse' beer here in Hollywood. I am a genuine Berliner and I prefer to drink that genuine German beer." The studio executives promptly assured Conrad that they would make the necessary arrangements to import that particular Berlin beer especially for Conrad, and this was done.

Conrad wasn't covetous of the ostentatious perquisites that many film stars insist be a part of their contracts. He wasn't concerned with impressing the world with his "importance" or his "star status." And the size and luxuriousness of his dressing room, and his limousine, weren't important to him.

Unknown to Conrad at the time he received the telephone call from Louis B. Mayer was the fact that another actor had previously been selected for the role of General von Kolb in *Escape*. This was the accomplished and respected actor, Paul Lukas. Director Mervyn LeRoy reluctantly took Lukas out of the film because he was dissatisfied with the interpretation Lukas gave to the role of the general. Lukas did several scenes in the early filming but when these initial "rushes" (unedited scenes filmed the day before) were viewed by producer/director LeRoy and chief executive Mayer, they agreed that Lukas' performance did not supply the desired menace. Later, when LeRoy learned from a friend that Veidt had arrived in America recently and might possibly be available, LeRoy immediately sought out studio boss Mayer and submitted an urgent request for Veidt's services. Mayer agreed with LeRoy's choice for this important role.

At approximately the same time that he chose Veidt for this film, director LeRoy made another felicitous casting assignment, that of Albert Bassermann, the legendary German actor. LeRoy had been dissatisfied

with the screen tests of several actors from Hollywood's German colony for the small but important role of a lawyer in the film. This lawyer, though sympathetic to the plight of the film's hero (played by Robert Taylor) in wanting to help his mother escape from Germany, is powerless against the omnipotent Gestapo who hold her prisoner. The lawyer pleads with Taylor's film character, in a dramatic scene, to return immediately to America before the Gestapo arrests him as well.

LeRoy was worried that a star of Bassermann's international stature would surely refuse such a small part but he offered the role to Bassermann anyway, apologizing for the smallness of the part as he did so. LeRoy was highly pleased when Bassermann stated: "It isn't how large the part is, but how good it is. I accept your offer." As expected, Bassermann gave a peerless performance.

Thus it was that two "alumni" from Berlin's old Reinhardt stage "academy," from the "class" of 1912-1918, Bassermann and Veidt, were reunited on the MGM set of *Escape* in 1940 Hollywood.

While Conrad was working in Hollywood on his second visit to America, he and Lily lived in a lovely home at 617 North Camden Drive in Beverly Hills.

The house was of white stucco, single story, with green wood trim and a high gabled roof. The backyard wasn't very large, and Conrad used it frequently as a golf putting green.

Lily, of course, was happy to be with her husband in America, rather than remaining behind in England, for the temporary business trip to America. Conrad, for his part, had finally found love and contentment with this, his third wife, and wanted Lily with him always. Veidt's first two marriages hadn't been successful but Lily seemed to be just what Conrad needed—a loving wife, a delightful friend and companion, and Conrad's most loyal and ardent fan. The only thing that marred Conrad's complete happiness was the fact that his only child, his daughter, Viola, wasn't able to come to America to live with them. Viola, in 1940, was still a teenager of fifteen and as such had to remain with her mother in Switzerland.

At approximately this time a new member joined the Veidt household. This was a fourteen-year-old British boy named Clive Wigram, a wartime evacuee from England, who became a houseguest for the duration of the war. Clive was the son of Conrad's physician and friend in London. The Veidts and Wigrams often had visited each other's homes or attended

movies, plays, and concerts together. Dr. Wigram and his wife were very much concerned, as were thousands of other British parents, about their child's welfare and safety during the dangerous and trying period of bombings and threats of invasion by Hitler's forces. Conrad and Lily, aware of the Wigram family's concern, offered to sponsor and accept Clive into their home for the duration of the war. Dr. and Mrs. Wigram were very grateful to the Veidts for their kindness and hospitality to Clive. Since Conrad and Lily had no children of their own, they felt much less lonely with Clive there and treated him as a member of the family. Clive, for his part, although he missed his parents considerably, thoroughly enjoyed living with the Veidts, and his stay in America was like an extended adventure. Clive later followed in his father's footsteps by becoming a doctor.

Conrad and Lily made a handsome couple wherever they went in the Hollywood area. When they went out for an evening of dining and a show, they were the center of all eyes. Lily was pretty and Conrad had a magnetic attraction about him.

In my opinion, Lily was a remarkable woman. She was an attractive, warm-hearted woman, of strong moral character, who was able to guide her husband with excellent career advice in his contacts with studio officials. There is an old saying that "A man is only as good as the woman who is telling him what to do!" I think this applies to Lily's efforts on Conrad's behalf; not in a nagging, disparaging way but in a kindly and helpful manner. Her complete love and devotion to Conrad was obvious. Lily was also a charming hostess on those frequent occasions when the Veidts invited friends and business associates over for dinner. Lily was, in short, the perfect wife for Conrad.

Conrad once described his married life with Lily as follows: "I have finally found the happiness I've been seeking for so long. I feel I ought to be touching wood, because my life with Lily is perfect. Lily is a marvelous wife, friend and companion."

One of Conrad's best friends in Hollywood in the early 1940s was the noted actor Basil Rathbone. Conrad and Basil had met in England a few years earlier and when Conrad came to Hollywood in 1940, they renewed their friendship. Conrad and Basil would often get together on weekends and try their hands at writing short stories and novels. They (and their wives) would take turns visiting one another's homes. Conrad and Basil would then sit down in the den, with a tall, cold drink for each, and

wrestle verbally with different story plots and ideas. Conrad often jokingly began his novels with the standard introductory sentence made famous by the British novelist, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, in his Gothic novels: "It was a dark and stormy night." While their husbands were so occupied, Lily Veidt and Ouida Rathbone would sit in the living room, discussing the war situation, their husbands' careers, the Hollywood social scene, the latest fashions from New York and Paris, and many other topics of interest. In so doing, they became great friends.

Since Conrad and Basil both excelled in villainous cinema roles, they tried jokingly to outdo each other in writing the most vile and unsavory characters they could imagine into the stories they authored.

Veidt was a frustrated writer, in that he often had the urge to do some serious writing; a novel or a play, perhaps, or some dramatic screenplays for the cinema. Aside from these attempted stories in collaboration with Basil, however, Conrad never actualized his wish to complete a novel.

He did, however, write the screenplay for the 1922 film *Lord Byron*, as well as direct the film and star in it. On other rare occasions, Conrad co-authored screenplays but his name was not listed in the film credits.

I have no idea whether Veidt/Rathbone writings had any literary merit, as none have survived or been published, to the best of my knowledge. But the two stars enjoyed their literary efforts anyway.

After Conrad and Lily were settled in their home in 1940, friends recommended that they try a well known restaurant in Hollywood called The Blue Danube. When Conrad and Lily entered the restaurant soon after that, they discovered to their great pleasure that the owners of the restaurant were Joe and Mia May, formerly of Berlin! This was a happy reunion for Conrad because Joe May was the producer of the very successful early silent film *Das Indische Grabmal* (The Indian Tomb) of 1922, which had featured Veidt. And Joe's wife, Mia, was Conrad's co-star in that same early melodrama.

Aside from the opportunity to discuss the old days of German cinema, and reminisce about mutual friends and their careers, Conrad and Lily enjoyed the restaurant itself very much. The menu boasted primarily Hungarian food, which was superb, and which Lily relished greatly. Also the strudel was fantastic. In addition, the restaurant featured musicians playing the zither, which added to the charm and atmosphere. Lily and Conrad became frequent patrons of The Blue Danube thereafter, and there they met many other members of the European cinema community

in Hollywood, such as Peter Lorre, Joe Pasternak, Gregory Ratoff, S.Z. Sakall, Ernst Lubitsch, Marlene Dietrich, Billy Wilder, Albert Bassermann, etc. Conrad and Lily were absolutely delighted to find this little bit of authentic Central Europe transplanted to Hollywood.

Conrad and Lily also became close friends with the French film star Charles Boyer and his charming British wife, Pat. The Veidts and the Boyers often would attend the theater together and the Veidts would frequently invite the Boyers over to their home for dinner. Conrad and Charles would occasionally reminisce about the production problems and other memories connected with the one time that they had worked "together" on a film. This was the science fiction melodrama of 1932, *FP 1 Doesn't Answer*.

I say they worked "together" because Conrad appeared in the English language version and Charles starred in the French version. Nevertheless, the two internationally-known stars, Veidt and Boyer, got to know each other well during the filming on location on the small island in the Baltic sea. Years later, when their careers brought them together again in Hollywood, they and their wives resumed their friendship.

Not long after Veidt's arrival in Los Angeles in 1940 he was interviewed by a feature writer for a Hollywood movie magazine. After answering several questions about his personal life Conrad was then



Conrad (right) enjoys a joke told by his good friend, Charles Boyer. In the center is Boyer's attractive British wife, Pat. The occasion was a posh black-tie affair at the El Capitan Theater in Los Angeles in 1942, in connection with a film premiere.

asked his opinion of the value of the motion picture. Conrad replied by quoting briefly from a thoughtful essay by the noted German writer, Thomas Mann: "The film is not just an art; it is life, it is actuality." Veidt further agreed with Mann's capsule summation that "the films give us a narrative in pictures of life." As such, Veidt contended, motion pictures were an invaluable tool for the expression of mankind's thoughts, ideals, history, and hopes for the future.

In 1940, a gala premiere of the film *The Thief of Bagdad* was held at the Carthay Circle Theater of Hollywood as a benefit for a hard-pressed and besieged England. Much of the considerable revenue from this special performance was donated to the British Ambulance Corps. Conrad and Lily attended the premiere as guests of honor. This fascinating film was a smashing success, playing to an SRO audience at this large theater.

In his film *Escape*, Conrad co-starred with Norma Shearer and Robert Taylor and Alla Nazimova, with Conrad in the part of the Nazi general who tries to block the efforts of the young American, Mark Preysing (Taylor) who has come to Germany to find his mother and take her back safely to America. Norma Shearer is cast as the Countess, who is the mistress of General von Kolb (Veidt) but who is gradually attracted to, and falls in love with, the young American, Mark. Mark's mother (Nazimova) is being held by the Nazis in a concentration camp for her anti-Nazi actions. The plot continues to build up suspense and the pace of the film is perfect. The imaginative and skillful direction was due to Mervin LeRoy, who also produced this motion picture. Albert Bassermann, Philip Dorn, and Felix Bressart were also featured in the excellent cast and did an extremely fine job in supporting roles.

*Escape* was a fine adaptation of the fascinating best-seller of the same name by Ethel Vance. The first-class screenplay followed the novel closely.

One very well known film critic of the day wrote that the villain (Veidt) was much more attractive than the hero of the film (Taylor). Veidt's mature good looks, and his poise and charm were especially noticeable in this film, in sharp contrast to Taylor's irritable and loud boorishness. Incidentally, Veidt donated his entire salary from his performance in *Escape* to British War Relief!

In addition to contributing mightily to the British war effort with monetary donations, Conrad felt he should be doing more for England and the Allied cause. He was determined to return to England, as soon as



his present film commitment was concluded, to offer his services to the defense of his adopted country. The executives of MGM, however, from studio boss Louis B. Mayer on down, all tried to dissuade Conrad from his avowed intention, using all the arguments they could think of. Their most effective argument was used when they told Conrad that he could do more for the Allied cause by continuing to make films, many of which helped make complacent Americans aware of the danger posed by the Axis powers.

In addition to wanting Conrad to stay in America for strictly selfish business reasons (Conrad's films were all highly successful at the box office), they felt that Conrad was really too old to be of any value to the British military forces. As the studio head Mayer bluntly expressed it: "Conrad, you're a blind, old man!" Conrad's immediate rebuttal was "I'm only forty-seven, and I'm not quite blind!" But Conrad later admitted to Lily that "the MGM executives were right. I couldn't do much for England. My eyesight is too weak and I'm too old for active duty."

Conrad was pleased at this opportunity to work in a film with leading lady Norma Shearer. Conrad had met Norma back in the late 1920s on his first visit to Hollywood but had never before participated with her in a film production. Conrad did not agree with the widely-held opinion in the movie capital that Miss Shearer's acting ability was merely adequate. Many envious starlets felt that it was only Miss Shearer's marriage to MGM production boss, Irving Thalberg, that enabled her to get the best casting assignments. Veidt told Louis B. Mayer that Norma Shearer was an attractive woman who was also a highly capable and hard-working actress.

Norma later told the MGM casting director, William Grady, that she was thankful that Veidt had been chosen for the important role of the general. She further stated that she was impressed by Veidt's brilliant acting technique and intense concentration during the actual filming. She concluded by saying: "It was a joy to work with such a richly gifted actor as Conrad Veidt."

In his richly detailed biography of Norma Shearer, author Gavin Lambert gives the following perceptive description: "Norma and Conrad Veidt struck an immediate rapport, and in their scenes together *Escape* comes alive. Their final confrontation allows Veidt to display his strong, sardonic glitter."<sup>1</sup>

1. *Norma Shearer*, by Gavin Lambert. Knopf Co., 1990.

Veidt received the National Board of Review acting award for his performance in *Escape*. After the success of *Escape*, Veidt received several superior offers for further cinema work in Hollywood. MGM was agreeably surprised both by the huge box office receipts and the heavy fan mail for Veidt. He was next cast in the psychological thriller *A Woman's Face*, in which he was teamed with Joan Crawford and Melvyn Douglas. This remarkable film had the kind of edge-of-seat excitement and suspense that moviegoers relish. The absorbing story is told in flashback form. The plot concerned a woman, Anna Holm (Joan Crawford), whose face is hideously disfigured and scarred, and who has learned to hate the world and everyone in it for shunning her. Veidt gave a bravura performance in the part of Torsten Barring, the unscrupulous aristocrat who can look into Anna's ravaged face without flinching, and who later tells Anna he loves her. But after that Barring takes terrible advantage of Anna's love for him by trying to force her into becoming a murderess. Barring intends to use Anna in a devilish plot to murder his young nephew in order to inherit the family fortune. Albert Bassermann was also a member of the fine and experienced cast, playing the senior member of the Barring family with verve and artistic ability.

There are several arresting scenes in the film. The scene in which Anna Holm first meets the despicable Barring is one. Then there is the very dramatic scene where Anna is in the doctor's dispensary and the surgeon is removing the bandages after the operation on her scarred and disfigured face. Another is the ride on the scenic railway where the governess, Anna, is steeling herself to push the child in her care out of the railway car into the rushing waters of the river far below. The courtroom scenes are also enthralling; the testimony of the witnesses provides an insight into the background of the accused governess. And finally, there is the chase scene which ends with the death of the aristocratic Barring. George Cukor's skillful direction; the marvelous acting of Veidt and the rest of the cast; and the imaginative and expert camera work by Robert Planck, together with a very fine screenplay and excellent musical background, all merged to produce a memorable motion picture, one with first-rate character studies of the leading roles.

A review of this film, as quoted in *Scribner's Commentary* of August, 1941, is excerpted as follows: "Miss Crawford and Mr. Douglas and oily Conrad Veidt, and Albert Bassermann give excellent performances in a murder picture which should pack theaters for a long time to come."



Conrad is shown here in one of his favorite roles, that of the malevolent Torsten Barrington of the film *A Woman's Face*.

Another film review of *A Woman's Face* stated: "This was one of the best films to come out of Hollywood in a long time!" Veidt's portrayal of the evil Torsten Barrington was outstanding.

Conrad thought very highly of the Torsten Barrington role assigned to him in *A Woman's Face*, as it gave him ample opportunity to enact the

dramatic conflict with the other players. Once when asked by a friend for a description of his Barring role, Conrad simply stated: "I'm Lucifer in a tuxedo!" This terse but apt comment was typical of Conrad's frequent clever witticisms.

Incidentally, Melvyn Douglas, Veidt's co-star in this film, was not in the least deceived by Conrad's facility in assuming a devilish persona. Of Veidt, Douglas said: "He is a sweet guy; a very gentle gentleman." Director George Cukor concurred, commenting: "Veidt was absolutely charming to work with. Really gay and funny, on the set and off."

To prove that time has not rendered *A Woman's Face* any the less appealing or less thrilling, let me cite a 1991 issue of the British film guide, *Time Out*. This periodical's film critic gives a highly favorable review of the film in general, and then concludes with his opinion of Veidt's performance: "It is Veidt who steals the show, satanic and sinister, as a decadent connoisseur of evil!"

In these last two films, *Escape* and *A Woman's Face*, Veidt had the great pleasure of working once more with the stage and screen idol of his early days in Germany, the distinguished character actor, Albert Bassermann. They exchanged many happy hours' reminiscences about their mutual friends and associates over the years, and about the old days in Germany under the Kaiser and in the Weimar Republic, before Nazism arose in Germany. They also compared notes on their respective careers on stage and in the cinema and, in general, thoroughly enjoyed each other's company.

After these two films had been exhibited, Conrad began to receive a huge quantity of fan mail through the MGM studios. This fact greatly surprised the MGM studio heads but this really should not have surprised them, considering Veidt's incomparable acting skills and his special appeal both to women and men.

In the course of viewing a typical villainous role by Veidt, most moviegoers went through four phases: fearing him, hating him, sympathizing with him and, finally, feeling attracted to him. This unusual combination of menace and magnetism in each Veidt performance became a hallmark of his, known to all the casting directors and producers.

Speaking of the European cinema community in Hollywood, the American film capital was a magnet which attracted the famous (and not-so-famous) members of Europe's political emigrants. With the rise to

power of Hitler and his maniacal Nazis there began a steadily increasing flow of talented people to Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s. These individuals represented the intellectual elite in Europe. At first they came from Germany but as the situation in Europe worsened these gifted writers, composers, film directors, actors, and designers came also from France, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries.

As Conrad and Lily gradually became settled in Hollywood, meeting old friends from Europe and making many new friends, they were visited at home one day by a small delegation. The delegation was composed of three influential Hollywood celebrities, all of whom were well known to Conrad from the old days in Europe. The visitors were Ernst Lubitsch, Salka Viertel, and Paul Kohner. The reason for their visit was to discuss their pet project, a cause they felt would interest Conrad. This was the European Film Fund (EFF), founded by them in October, 1939.

Lubitsch, of course, was a world-famous film director; Mrs. Viertel was a respected scriptwriter; and Paul Kohner was one of the top Hollywood film agents. They described to Conrad and Lily, in detail, the purpose of the EFF, some of the membership of the Fund, and their plans to enlarge the Fund in the future as more and more refugees from Hitler's Europe converged on southern California. Conrad was enthusiastic about the EFF. He could easily relate to the plight of the European refugees, as he and Lily were in the same category themselves. Conrad's concern for the refugees was deep and sincere, and not merely a reluctant lip service. So both Conrad and Lily joined the EFF. It was not long thereafter that Conrad was elected to the governing committee of the Fund.

The European Film Fund was established to raise funds to assist the European immigrants financially until they could stand on their own, and to find suitable employment in the motion picture industry for the new arrivals. The EFF Committee contacted film studio executives who, following the example of Louis B. Mayer of MGM and Harry Warner of Warner Brothers, generously contributed both funds and jobs for these talented but almost destitute refugees. Unofficially, the EFF committee members also aided the immigrants in finding homes, and helping them become assimilated into the California environment and culture, so different from their homelands.

A few of the famous expatriates from Europe during this period were Heinrich Mann, Franz Werfel, Bertolt Brecht, Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinsky, Berthold Viertel, Erich Pommer, Billy Wilder, and Peter Lorre.

Conrad and Lily devoted considerable time and effort to working for the EFF. Conrad also donated a sizable percentage of his salary to this charitable and worthwhile fund. A noted film critic once described Conrad in these words: "We shouldn't let his splendid acting accomplishments cause us to forget that Conrad Veidt was also a philanthropist and humanitarian as well as a courageous activist and advocate of many worthwhile causes for the betterment of mankind. The fact that much of his philanthropy and good deeds was done anonymously, without any publicity, adds to the quality of his gifts and character."

In 1941, Veidt co-starred with a new leading lady, the lovely and captivating Loretta Young, in the Columbia release, *The Men in Her Life*, a fascinating and very much under-rated film. I say "under-rated" advisedly because many of the reviews of this film were critical and negative. Several film critics of that day opined that the film was "superficial" or the "performances artificial." In my humble opinion, the film was great entertainment, with Veidt's interpretation of the character of Rosing, the aging ballet master in love with his young protegee, an exceptionally fine performance.



In 1941, Veidt excelled in the role of Stanislas Rosing, the retired ballet master, in the romantic story *The Men in Her Life*. Loretta Young (left) portrayed the circus performer who becomes a famous ballerina under Rosing's strict tutelage.

Perhaps it was similar to the situation that faced the noted British poet and dramatist, Oscar Wilde, many years ago. It seems that Wilde's current stage play was being panned unmercifully by audiences and critics alike. When a friend asked Wilde how his play was doing in a London theater, Wilde reportedly replied: "The play is a great success, but the audience is a failure!"

Or perhaps this film didn't please more viewers because it was a so-called "women's picture." It wasn't full of slam-bang action; neither did it carry a message of world-shaking importance. But it did capture the hopes and dreams of a woman who was forced to choose between her career and the man she loves. Director Gregory Ratoff made the film highly sentimental but did not allow it to become mawkish.

This film gave a brief but engrossing view into the world of ballet, and was based on the book *Ballerina* by Lady Eleanor Smith. Veidt played the role of one of the men in the life of the young ballerina, Polly Varley. He was the aging ballet master, who was very strict and demanding with the ballerina (Young) in her training but who loved her deeply also.

After years of difficult and intensive ballet training, Polly Varley makes her stage debut and is an immediate success. She is also wooed by a handsome young fellow (John Sheppard), and others. At this point Polly must make a choice—whether to continue with her promising career as a ballerina, or give up the world of ballet for the handsome young suitor who wishes to marry her. She also feels much gratitude and devotion to the ballet master who loves her also, and Polly finally decides to marry him. Later Polly fondly recalls the many suitors she had in the past.

For a brief review of this tremendously entertaining motion picture, I refer to the following excerpt from *Scholastic Magazine* of November 17, 1941: "Conrad Veidt does a flawless piece of work in the difficult role of the ballet master who raises the little dancer (Loretta Young) from obscurity by the sheer force of his genius and his will."

Along with Miss Young and Veidt, this lavishly produced period romance boasted the acting services of Ann Todd, Dean Jagger, John Sheppard, Eugenie Leontovich, and Otto Kruger, superb actors all.

The German people like to tell a little joke about languages. They say that someone who speaks three languages is called tri-lingual. Someone who speaks two languages is called bi-lingual. And someone who speaks only one language is called an American! Conrad, as is the case with most Europeans, was conversant in several languages. He was fluent in

German, English, and French. He also had a good working knowledge of Russian from his World War I days in the Russian sector of the war front. From this background Conrad was able to hold a conversation in Russian with Gregory Ratoff, the Russian-born director of *The Men in Her Life*.

Also released in 1941 was *Whistling in the Dark*, an MGM film directed by S. Sylvan Simon. The thrills and laughs were about evenly spaced in this popular and amusing motion picture. Veidt was abundantly entertaining in the role of Joseph Jones, the homicidal leader of a phony religious sect that preyed on its wealthy and elderly members. Jones plotted to gain control of the financial estates of members who died, arranging to have the members donate their money in their wills to the religious cult. His evil plans were thwarted by the character played by Red Skelton. The fine cast included Eve Arden, Virginia Grey, Ann Rutherford, and Rags Ragland.

Veidt played his villainous role in a marvelous tongue-in-cheek manner, displaying his usual charm. Conrad was able to convey the perfect blend of evil, cynicism, and poise in this role. A good example of this occurred in the final scenes, when Veidt, as Jones, is being placed under arrest by the police. Veidt, smiling benignly on all persons present, stated the standard farewell of the religious cult: "We part in radiant contentment."

The film, flawed by the sluggish direction and by the contrived screenplay, was partially redeemed by the first-rate performances of Veidt and the inimitable and irrepressible Miss Arden.

MGM was greatly pleased by the unexpectedly large box-office receipts from this low-budget comedy/thriller. In fact, this film was so successful that MGM produced two sequels to it. Veidt was not in the cast of either sequel, however, having received offers of roles with more dramatic content and impact.

Although I enjoyed *Whistling in the Dark*, there was something unjust and incongruous about an actor of Veidt's international stature and experience playing a woefully subordinate role while a mere comedian (Skelton) played the starring part and received top billing. I was pleased, therefore, to read a review by a noted film critic of the day who wrote: "Skelton's rather crude efforts are made so much the less effective by his having to play opposite the polished villainy of Conrad Veidt."

As a matter of cold fact, MGM was truly amazed at the enthusiastic response Veidt was receiving from his fans, who wrote a small mountain of fan mail to him, in care of the studio. A survey of the fan mail indicated



that women were especially drawn to Veidt, but it also revealed that a large number of men also approved of Veidt's acting style and the roles he portrayed. Louis Mayer had originally signed Veidt to a contract for



Veidt (center) is pictured here as Joseph Jones, the leader of a fraudulent religious sect which preyed on its wealthy members, in the amusing and exciting MGM film of 1941, *Whistling in the Dark*.

*Escape* because he was well aware of Veidt's outstanding international reputation as an accomplished actor. Mayer thought that Veidt's presence in the cast would give the film additional prestige. Mayer had no idea, however, that Veidt would be such a valuable motion picture asset, one who would draw filmgoers to their local theaters in droves, causing box-office receipts to swell.

There was a common theme that seemed to run through the majority of fan letters that Conrad received from women. That was his tremendous appeal to them in spite of the villainous roles he portrayed. Women who had seen Conrad as the wicked Grand Vizier Jaffar in *The Thief of Bagdad* would write to say that if they had been the princess they would have chosen Jaffar rather than the young caliph. Those who had seen Conrad as the despicable Torsten Barrington in *A Woman's Face* stated unequivocally that they would have preferred Barrington no matter what he had done. Other women wrote that though they knew they were supposed to hate the German general in *Escape*, they couldn't help but be attracted to him, in Conrad's sympathetic portrayal, rather than to the churlish Robert Taylor character. And, shortly, many women would write to say that it hurt them to see Conrad, as Major Strasser in *Casablanca*, being "killed" by the Humphrey Bogart character. Veidt had the strange ability to somehow mesmerize women in the audience and make himself appealing to them, regardless of how diabolical his role was in any given film. The volume of fan mail written to Veidt was nearly the equal of that received individually by such "heart-throb" stars of the day as Clark Gable, Cary Grant, Robert Taylor, or Gary Cooper.

While Veidt projected an obvious romantic attraction that appealed to nearly all women, he also projected certain qualities that appealed to his male viewers. This was a projection of the male viewers' own wishes. Whether portraying a villain or a hero, Veidt usually displayed a persona that almost glowed with poise, sophistication, intelligence, steely determination, and courage. These qualities, and Veidt's way of expressing them, appealed to male viewers because they were a composite of what the male viewer wished to be himself.

Veidt had completed three films for MGM (all three being money-makers to a marked degree) and Mayer had received requests from two other studios wishing to have Veidt's services on loan. Mayer agreed to these loans of Veidt to other studios (Columbia and Warner Brothers), but also advised his own casting directors to find more and better film

roles for Veidt. Although Veidt always accepted the roles offered to him (such as the rather demeaning and inadequate part assigned to him in *Whistling in the Dark*), he vastly preferred a good, heavily dramatic role, one with strong conflict between the characters.

Another wartime film of Veidt's, released in 1941, was the Warner Brothers motion picture *All Through the Night*, which had a huge cast of veteran actors and actresses, and which made exciting film entertainment. Along with Veidt, who played the part of the Nazi leader, Ebbing, there were Humphrey Bogart, Peter Lorre, Jane Darwell, Martin Kosleck, Barton McLane, Judith Anderson, Wallace Ford, Kaaren Verne, Frank McHugh, Phil Silvers, Jackie Gleason, Hans Schumm, and many other fine actors in supporting roles. The plot, in a nutshell, is that Veidt and his Nazi cohorts (Lorre, Anderson, Kosleck, and Schumm) plan to attack and sink an American battleship in New York harbor. They are opposed by a group of gangsters (Bogart, McHugh, McLane, et al.). The gangsters' basic patriotism for America wins out over their normal greed for money



Veidt (seated) as the master spy in a Nazi spy ring, along with a leering Peter Lorre (left); Hans Schumm (center, standing); Kaaren Verne (second from right) as the victim of the Nazis; and Judith Anderson (right), as a spy ring member, in the thrilling 1941 Warner Brothers film *All Through the Night*.

and power, as they battle the Nazis in an impressive and suspenseful climax. In this final scene Veidt, as the vicious Nazi Ebbing, drives a speedboat, heavily laden with high explosives, straight at an American battleship in the harbor. The suspense builds as Ebbing, in this last-ditch, suicide attack, nears the huge battleship.

The resulting film was an unusual and fascinating blend of typical gangster, spy, and comedy motion pictures, all expertly mixed into one fine film. This clever comedy-thriller was a very entertaining spoof of the gangster genre, together with an excellent sub-plot added to fan wartime patriotism in our fight against the Nazis. This film didn't take itself too seriously and, as a result, it was tremendous fun to watch.

Soon after the completion of *All Through the Night*, Conrad was invited to a studio preview of the film. At the conclusion of this showing, amid loud clapping by several studio sycophants, Conrad was asked by a member of the production staff what he thought of the film. Although not particularly impressed with the rather pedestrian screenplay Conrad, with characteristic tact, chose to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln's famous quotation: "For the sort of people who like this sort of film, this is the sort of film that sort of people will like!"

It is my firm opinion that Veidt deserved better roles than those assigned to him in *All Through the Night* and *Whistling in the Dark*. But every great actor, bound by the terms of his contract, must comply with studio edicts and participate in mediocre and inferior low-budget programmers. However, Veidt was able to rise above weak story-material, poor screenplays and inept direction, while turning in sterling performances in the process.

Veidt's obvious intelligence enabled him to quickly grasp a director's intent in the portrayal of a given role. Veidt's characterization of Baldwin, in *The Student of Prague*, as just one example, was flawless. Veidt was able to indicate great depth of emotion, without unnecessary histrionics and gestures. Without Veidt's distinguished performance, this film would have become a mere routine melodrama of no particular importance.

Of the above five films of Conrad's, three of them were produced by MGM, and one each by Columbia and Warner Brothers studios. In addition, there were several more motion pictures in the offing, with Veidt in important supporting roles. All of this attested to the fact that other studios were belatedly realizing Veidt's rapidly growing box-office attraction and his appeal both to men and women movie-goers, young



Veidt and fellow spy Peter Lorre are seen here, with knitted brows, in a tense scene from the 1941 espionage thriller *All Through the Night*.

and old alike. These studios now wished to sign Veidt on contract loan from MGM for films of their own. Veidt's name was frequently mentioned in the casting memos for new films in the works.

There is an old Hollywood saying that producers like to quote to overly-demanding actors at contract-signing time: "An actor is only as

good as his last picture." According to this theory, Veidt was in an excellent bargaining position since each of his films served to enhance his stature as a talented and versatile character actor. Each of his films was successful commercially. Veidt's agent never had a difficult time in "selling" Veidt to the studios.

At about this time in the early 1940s, there was a publicity campaign initiated by one of the studios that had Conrad under contract. In this campaign a movie poster, the type used in theater lobbies, carried the slogan: "Women fight—for Conrad Veidt!" Although well into his forties at that time, Veidt retained his tremendous visual appeal. The greyhound-lean frame of his youth had filled out to a solid 182 pounds. His piercing blue eyes, coupled with his somewhat exotic use of a monocle, his sensual voice: all these managed to attract women of all ages, from all stations in life, in large numbers. The famous British beauty, actress Merle Oberon (later Mrs. Alexander Korda), once described Veidt in her fascinating book as "that racy charmer!"<sup>2</sup>

His family had to accustom themselves to this aspect of life with their beloved Conrad. Once he and his family were vacationing in the Swiss Alps in 1937, and they stayed at the Palace Hotel in St. Moritz. While there, Conrad was the recipient of adoring glances from an elegant and dainty Maharani from India. She was absolutely fascinated by Conrad and followed him around the lobby and dining room of the hotel. She was dressed in a lovely sari and wore a valuable gem in one of her nostrils. One day there would be an emerald, the next a ruby, then a sapphire, and then a pearl in that nostril.

The Maharani even sent valuable gifts to Conrad, with perfumed and effusive love notes attached. These gifts were delivered, in secret, by a hotel bellboy with strict instructions from the Maharani to give the presents only to Herr Veidt. Conrad, after reading the notes, returned the gifts to the Maharani, with a tactful note explaining his regrets.

Viola, who was only twelve years old at the time, was particularly fascinated by the gems that adorned the Maharani's nostril. When the Veidts were having supper in the hotel dining room, Viola asked her father what the Maharani did when she had to sneeze or blow her nose! Viola wanted her father to ask the Maharani about this. Conrad smiled at Viola's youthful curiosity and admitted that he too was wondering about

the same thing. But he told Viola that since they were ladies and gentlemen, they could not ask the Maharani such a personal question.

Conrad was equally besieged by women who were secretaries, maids, sales clerks, nurses, as well as heiresses and the cream of high society—all of them were enamored by Conrad's film roles and by his off-screen appearance as well. Many of these ladies kept a studio photograph of Conrad in their boudoirs. The incident of the love-sick Maharani was not an isolated incident. Conrad was beset and followed by women fans wherever he traveled. Women all over the world flocked to theaters to see his films. Of course, this activity was not limited to Veidt—most movie stars are the subject of similar adulation by their fans. But this attraction that Conrad possessed lasted all of his life.

This is how one devoted Veidt fan, a woman, expressed it: "Each time I see Conrad Veidt in a film, it seems as though he is reaching out from the screen to me. To me alone, touching my heart with his eyes, his voice, his words, his arms. In each of his cinematic roles I sense the same overpowering magnetism emanating from him. I suppose every woman in the audience feels the same attraction to him. It doesn't matter that in the screenplay Conrad Veidt may be speaking to Vivien Leigh, or to Joan Crawford, or Loretta Young, or Norma Shearer, or Ingrid Bergman. In each feminine *viewer's* mind and heart Conrad is speaking to *her alone*."

In regards to the outstanding critical and commercial success of the film *A Woman's Face*, due in large measure to Conrad's remarkable performance, I would like to add a footnote of interest. In 1942, Conrad was invited to participate in a radio dramatization of *A Woman's Face* as part of the Lux Radio Theater's series of fine dramas. Conrad performed in the same role, that of Torsten Barrington, that he had made memorable in the film version. The two other leading roles, those of Anna Holm and Dr. Segert, were given expert interpretations by Ida Lupino and Brian Aherne, respectively. The program was hosted by famed director, Cecil B. De Mille. The program also carried the patriotic wartime message to listeners to buy war bonds.

Conrad also took part in three other radio dramas in 1942 and 1943. The first was entitled *Hate* and was a new play written by the noted dramatist, Arch Oboler. The NBC network presented this fine drama on March 29, 1942, as one of a series called "Plays for Americans." Conrad had the key role of the Norwegian pastor, Father Halvorsen. The setting was Norway at the time of the German invasion. At first, Father Halvor-

sen recommended patience, and obedience to the German conquerors, in his sermons to his congregation. But later, when the Nazi commander breaks his word to the pastor and has several Norwegians hanged, the pastor realizes that appeasement won't work and he kills the Nazi commander himself.

The next play was *The People March*. This was presented on February 21, 1943, by the Hollywood Writers Mobilization in cooperation with the Federal Office of War Information. The play was written, produced, and directed by Arch Oboler. The cast included Veidt, Alla Nazimova, Philip Dorn, and Helen Mack. The message of this play was that a better world of peace, freedom, and jobs and food for all would result in the defeat of the Axis enemies. This message was meant to bolster the morale of the American citizens at this dark period in World War II.

The third play was *Return to Berchtesgaden* and was aired on February 21, 1943, as part of the series "The Treasury Star Parade. This series was sponsored by the U.S. Treasury Department, which made an appeal for Americans to buy war bonds. The play itself was a moving drama about Adolf Hitler, in his mountaintop fortress, being haunted and reviled by the spirits of several of his famous victims. Among these were the spirits of King Leopold of Belgium, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, Chancellor Dollfus of Austria, and Pastor Niemoller of Germany. Conrad gave a stirring speech against Hitler and the Nazis in his role of Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg of Austria, who courageously tried to keep Austria independent but was forced out of office when the Nazis invaded Austria.

I have previously mentioned several examples of Conrad's strong desire to help the British war effort with his large donations. I should also mention that from 1941 on, Conrad was equally determined and committed to assisting the American war effort. In addition to taking part (on an unpaid basis) in these and other radio dramas, Conrad purchased American war bonds and participated in war bond drives by making public appearances at bond rallies with other Hollywood film stars. From his two periods of living in the United States Conrad had developed a strong and genuine affection for America and the American people.

The great American philosopher and essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, once wrote: "A man finds room in the few square inches of his face for the traits of all his ancestors, for the expression of all his history, and his wants." Veidt's face had an expression that combined his history and his



wants. It was a face that indicated distinction, individuality, character, strength, and creativity. Veidt's face also reminds me of a painting I once saw in an art museum: a tall, lean, aristocratic man with the outward appearance of being very sinister, sensuous, commanding, formidable, and enigmatic.



In this publicity still from the 1942 Academy Award-winning film *Casablanca*, we see Veidt in the role of the suave but dangerous Nazi Major Strasser. This was Veidt's last major film success, released not long before his death.

There was a strong aura of menace about Veidt's face. It emanated primarily from his eyes—those cold, steely blue eyes that seemed to send forth burning rays toward his viewers. But there was also the wide forehead, the knitted brows, and the firm jaw. Veidt, on occasion, could and did portray a kindly, gentle, altruistic individual. For example, there was his atypical role of the saintly Stranger in the 1935 British classic *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. But the great majority of his roles called for his specialty—projecting an image of unrelenting, cruel, and evil menace.

One facial feature of Conrad's that became famous was a vein in his forehead. Often, when Conrad was portraying a character involved in an angry or emotional scene, this vein would throb noticeably. It was really another trademark of his, like his famous monocle.

In March, 1942, MGM began the filming of an excellent (though often under-rated) melodrama about a German spy network in America, with Veidt starring in a difficult dual role. This film was *Nazi Agent*. The film studios would often produce motion pictures that paralleled the news events and trends of the day. In this regard, Americans were stunned to learn in the newspapers and on their radios that the FBI had captured several Nazi spies along our east coast during this period. These were German agents who had been landed on our shores by submarines and had slipped ashore surreptitiously at night on isolated beaches. The Nazi plan was that these agents would then be absorbed by the German community in America, and would pose as German diplomatic personnel, or businessmen, or private citizens.

In this film Veidt was cast as twin brothers, Otto and Hugo. Hugo is the Nazi agent of the film title, a rabid Nazi who is the German consul in New York. Otto is a pleasant, quiet sort of person, who owns and operates a combination book and philatelic store, and who wants to be a good and true American citizen. But Hugo forces Otto into allowing the German spy ring to use his stamp store as a "front" for the spies. Later Otto kills Hugo and takes his place at the consulate. In so doing he is able to expose the German spy ring. Without Veidt in the leading roles, this might have been an ordinary spy thriller. With Veidt in the leading roles, the film becomes a truly-first-rate suspenseful motion picture.

A dual role is always difficult for an actor but Veidt carried this characterization off skillfully and intelligently. Conrad's performance was truly remarkable in that he gave a convincing portrayal of two very



Veidt (at left) on the set of *Nazi Agent* with director Jules Dassin. They are discussing the script which calls for Conrad to play a dual role in this exciting espionage melodrama.

different brothers. Veidt's Otto and Hugo appeared as two persons who were related but who looked differently, who walked and talked differently, and who thought and behaved differently. Some of the credit for this successful illusion was certainly due to the fine camera work of Harry Stradling and the imaginative and skillful direction of Jules Dassin. But perhaps most was due to Conrad's masterful interpretation of two disparate roles.

Next came another major highlight in Veidt's fantastic career, this being the memorable motion picture *Casablanca*. In May, 1942, Veidt received an offer from Warner Brothers to participate in a new anti-Nazi film. Veidt was very much interested and after hearing a brief outline of the plot and getting an inkling of the fine cast Warners had in mind for this film, he accepted the role with enthusiasm.

On May 25, 1942, production began on the film. Casting of all acting roles had been completed; the writers had finished approximately one-half of the screenplay; and both the producer, Hal Wallis, and director,



Veidt laughs when he discovers that he has just been the victim of a practical joke by chief cameraman Harry Stradling (center, dark suit) and his two assistants, Sam Minski (left) and Bobby Moreno (right). It all happened on the set of MGM's film *Nazi Agent*, in 1942.

Mike Curtiz, were anxious to begin filming. Veidt arrived at the Warners studio set early in that morning, shortly after the first filming had begun. Although Conrad wasn't scheduled for any scenes that day, he wanted to "get the feeling" of the studio and the screenplay, and meet the people, both cast and crew, with whom he would be working. After viewing a goodly portion of the first day's shooting, Conrad departed the studio with barely concealed feelings of eagerness to begin his own work in scenes designed for the character of Major Strasser.

Conrad was still working on the film *Nazi Agent* at this time. After Conrad completed his scenes for that film at the MGM studios on June 8, 1942, he immediately reported for work at the Warner Brothers studio for *Casablanca*. An actor sometimes has to work on two films concurrently.

Then, not long after Conrad began the *Casablanca* filming, he was notified by his agent that MGM studios wanted Conrad again for an upcoming film. This film was the espionage thriller *Above Suspicion*, which would feature Joan Crawford and Fred MacMurray in starring roles. Conrad's agent further stated that production was scheduled to begin on that new film soon after the filming of *Casablanca* was scheduled to end.

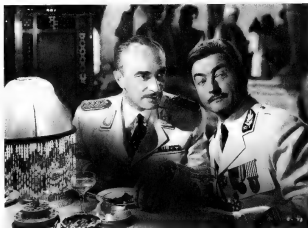
Conrad was delighted with the almost constant demand for his acting services since he had arrived in the United States in 1940, for a supposedly brief visit. Conrad liked the challenge of each new role he received. Whether it was a starring role or a supporting role, Conrad enjoyed learning his lines and studying the part in detail. Once Conrad was interviewed by a cinema magazine writer who inquired, among other questions, what Conrad's plans were for retirement from acting, Conrad thought about it for a moment and then replied: "No real actor can ever retire. By a 'real actor' I mean one who, like myself, has never known any other profession. To whom the urge to act is as inborn as the surgeon's urge to heal, the artist's urge to paint, or the author's urge to write. No, I can never retire from acting as long as there are roles offered to me."

That evening, as Conrad told Lily the good news of his selection to the cast of *Above Suspicion*, he commented that this next film would be his eighth film in America in a three-year period! Conrad marveled at the good luck that had come to him. As Conrad and Lily drank a toast that evening to the next film, little did they suspect that it would be Conrad's last motion picture.

But to return to the film in progress—*Casablanca*. Director Curtiz' film trademark was the fast-paced story and camera work. He didn't linger overly long on any one aspect of the script. And *Casablanca* was no exception. The script, the action, the stellar cast, and the fluid camera work kept the audiences totally absorbed.

One bonus for the film was timeliness. This film was released about one week after the Allied military landings in Morocco and the capture of Casablanca. Another lucky plus for the film, and the Warner Brothers publicity department, was the fact that later President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill chose Casablanca as the site of their summit meeting. All this gave free publicity to the film, as the name Casablanca was in the headlines quite frequently during this time.

*Casablanca* became one of the most popular so-called "cult films," and the many members of its following often meet at one of the frequent



Two of the stars who helped make the 1942 Warner Brothers classic film *Casablanca* the great hit that it was: Veidt as Nazi Major Strasser, and Claude Rains (right) as the French Prefect of Police, Captain Renault.

showings of the film where they gleefully exchange excerpts from its famous script. I refer to such well-known lines as:

—"Play it again, Sam" (although this was not exactly the wording used in the film script)

—"I stick my neck out for no one"

—"Go ahead and shoot, you'll be doing me a favor!"

—"But we'll always have Paris!"

—"The problems of two people don't amount to a hill of beans in this world."

—"Here's looking at you, kid."

—and that famous bit of screen dialogue between Ingrid Bergman and Paul Henreid, in which she implores him: "Please, Victor, don't go to the underground meeting tonight!"

—also that memorable line, which some people will view as being corny perhaps: "Was that cannon fire, or is it my heart pounding?"

—and finally, the famous line spoken by Humphrey Bogart, on seeing his former sweetheart, Ilsa, after many years: "Of all the gin joints in all the towns in the world, she walks into mine!"

According to film writer/critic Gabe Essoe, *Casablanca* is the most frequently shown film on television today. Also according to the same writer, *Casablanca* placed on the list of the ten greatest American films of all time.<sup>3</sup>

Film critic Leonard Maltin, in his authoritative and invaluable reference work, rated *Casablanca* as "Our candidate for the best Hollywood movie of all time!"<sup>4</sup>

One of the odd things about *Casablanca* is that it has grown even more popular today than it was when first released in late 1942.

In 1942, all of the Hollywood studios were rushing to make films about World War II. All types of films were made: many showing land action involving Army infantry or Marine fighting men in combat action; some showing the naval and air forces in action; and some war films of the spy genre. Some time previously Warner Brothers had purchased the screen rights to a play which had never been produced on the stage. The play had been written by Murray Burnett and Joan Allison and was entitled *Everybody Comes To Rick's*. It had an exotic locale which the studio heads at Warners felt would make an excellent cinema vehicle for some of their contract stars.

This fine story concerned the flood of refugees, during World War II, who came to North Africa from all corners of Nazi Europe. They came to Casablanca with their pitifully few belongings and assets, trying desperately to book passage to anywhere in the Free World. Many of them would meet nightly at Rick's American cabaret, hoping against hope to find someone there who could help them escape from the Nazis. The drama and suspense build as Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid), an important member of the anti-Nazi underground organization, and his wife, Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) arrive one evening at Rick's nightclub, and meet, in succession, the French police officer in charge, Captain Renault (Claude Rains), and the German Army officer on a special mission, Major Strasser (Conrad Veidt), and the owner of the club, Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart). The plot develops with the battle of wits between Major Strasser and Captain Renault against the Laszlos and Rick, ending with an exciting climax at the Casablanca airport.

Prior to the arrival of the Laszlos in Casablanca, an Axis courier had been murdered and the two exit visas or letters of transit that he was

3. *The Book of Movie Lists*, by Gabe Essoe. Arlington House, 1981.

4. *TV Movie and Video Guide*, by Leonard Maltin. New American Library, 1987.

delivering to his headquarters had been stolen and were believed to be somewhere in Casablanca. The prime suspect in the murder and theft is an odious little man named Ugarte (marvelously played by Peter Lorre) who frequents Rick's club.

Major Strasser's primary concern is the recovery of the two stolen letters of transit, and the arrest of the person responsible for the murder of the courier. The film is a triumph of casting. Veidt was perfect for the part of the arrogant heel-clicking Nazi officer, Major Strasser, and played it with his usual artistry.



Major Strasser arrives in Casablanca. In the 1942 classic, which has become a cult film, Veidt (center) gave the role of Nazi Major Strasser a unique characterization. Here Strasser is greeted at the airport by the French Prefect of Police, Captain Renault, expertly played by Claude Rains (right, black uniform).

Academy Award-winning screenwriter, Howard Koch, wrote a marvelously fascinating and detailed treatise about the script, the legend, and the making of this film. In his book, Koch properly asks the question: "And did any actor, including the great von Stroheim, ever play a Nazi officer with the precise arrogance and implicit evilness of Conrad Veidt?"<sup>5</sup>

5. *Casablanca*, by Howard Koch. Overlook Press, 1973.



One of the finest casts ever assembled for a motion picture, a splendid mixture of experienced and attractive players, contained the following: Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid, Conrad Veidt, Claude Rains, Sydney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre, S.Z. Sakall, Dooley Wilson, John Qualen, Leonid Kinskey, Helmut Dantine, Marcel Dalio and Ludwig Stossel. The international quality of this cast is quite evident.

*Casablanca* had just about everything an audience might want in a motion picture: an excellent plot, a fabulous cast of experienced thespians, drama, romance, intrigue, suspense, comic relief, a dash of wartime patriotism thrown in for good measure. There is action, danger, excitement, and exotic scenery—Morocco and its environs, with people from all over the world meeting in the microcosm of the port city of Casablanca at this critical point in history. There also is a dash of world politics (The Allies vs. the Axis Powers; Vichy France vs. Free France; North Africa and its own tensions, etc.). And there is the lovely song *As Time Goes By*, sung by Dooley Wilson.

Director Curtiz managed to bring together all these marvelous actors and the remarkable, literate screenplay, the excellent camera work, and the fine musical score into a fantastic Hollywood legend.

I especially liked the brief but pointed verbal exchange between Captain Renault (Claude Rains) and Major Strasser (Conrad Veidt) on the major's arrival in Casablanca: Renault: "Unoccupied France welcomes you. But you may find the climate of Casablanca a trifle warm, Major." Strasser: "Oh, we Germans must get used to all climates, from Russia to the Sahara!"

I also liked the bit of humor in the excellent dialogue as Veidt makes his entrance into Rick's Club. The script calls for the waiter, Carl (S.Z. Sakall) to meet Major Strasser's party and show them to a table. Captain Renault instructs Carl to give Major Strasser the best table in the club. Carl replies: "I have already given him the best, sir—knowing that he is German and would take it anyway!"

The fine script, the marvelous acting and the superlative direction were three reasons why this perennial favorite continues to appeal to new generations of viewers, as well as retaining the nostalgic acclaim of the older audiences.

In early 1943, when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences held their annual Awards Dinner and ceremony and the Academy Awards were presented in the usual glamorous Hollywood manner, the cinematic

appeal of *Casablanca* garnered three Oscars. The film won the Academy Award for Best Film of the Year; and an Oscar went to Michael Curtiz for Best Direction of a Film; and another Oscar went to the three screenwriters (the brothers Julius and Philip Epstein and Howard Koch) for the Best Written Screenplay of the Year. In addition, Hal Wallis, the producer of *Casablanca*, received the coveted Irving Thalberg Award for his work on the film. Also the film was honored by the National Board of Review and the *New York Times* in their respective Ten Best Films of the Year Awards.

One memorable and touching scene in the film is the polarized singing match that erupts spontaneously between the German military personnel and the French persons there in the club. The German soldiers at one table start it all by singing, rather loudly as is their wont, a rousing German national song (*The Watch on the Rhine*), which wins the beaming approval of Major Strasser from his nearby table. As can be imagined, a loud Teutonic patriotic song being sung by Germans in a French colony, a refuge for persons fleeing German aggression, is not well received. So then the members of the French community and their many sympathizers, of all nationalities, retaliate by singing a poignant rendition of the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*. Although Rick, the owner of the club, pretends to be strictly neutral, he gives his nod of approval to the French personnel in singing their song. Then the contest really begins in earnest, with both sides trying to sing louder and out-do the other side. Major Strasser attempts to encourage the German singers to do better. But the match ends with the Germans being greatly outnumbered and losing badly, causing Major Strasser and his entourage to leave the club in a livid rage.

This singing match in *Casablanca* is such a highly-charged emotional experience that I can't imagine anyone viewing this scene without being moved by it.

In addition to working again with Humphrey Bogart (they were also on opposing sides in the thriller *All Through the Night*), Conrad also had an opportunity to work with his great, good friend Paul Henreid, whom Conrad had known in Europe. He also had, in this cinema production, the rare opportunity to work again with two fine actors, formerly of the European stage and screen, whom Conrad had known in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s: Peter Lorre, whose first major screen success was in the remarkable German thriller *M*; and also S.Z. Sakall, who performed in many Max Reinhardt stage productions in Europe.



Conrad is shown here during the emotional singing match scene in *Casablanca* as he exhorts the German personnel in the club to sing louder.

Speaking of Conrad's friendship with Paul Henreid, Conrad was able to do a good turn for Paul Henreid in 1939. At that time Veidt had been living in England for about seven years and was an established, respected, and much admired member of the British film colony. Henreid had come to England from the Continent in 1937 and had taken part in several English films. However, his status became quite precarious when Great Britain entered World War II against Germany in 1939. As a native of Austria, now an integral part of the saber-rattling new German Reich, Henreid was considered by the British to be an enemy alien. At this point Veidt interceded with the British government on Henreid's behalf, asking that Henreid be permitted to stay in England and work there. Veidt requested that Henreid not be interned in a camp for Nazi sympathizers and aliens of doubtful loyalty to England. Veidt stated that he would vouch for Henreid and convinced the British government that Henreid would not be a security risk to England. Henreid never forgot Veidt's generous support and assistance in his hour of need.

Conrad's salary for his part in *Casablanca* was \$5000 per week, which equalled the salaries of the film's top stars Bogart, Bergman, and Henried. This was a good indication of his value to the film and to Warners (who had to negotiate Conrad's loan from MGM) and it was a monetary indication of his acting skill and his tremendous international standing as a film star. Warner Brothers had paid \$20,000 for the rights to the play, which was the highest price ever paid for an unproduced play.

Despite the fact that the screenplay of *Casablanca* was completed on what seemed to be a "work as you go" plan, with many changes being made in the script, the filming of this great motion picture took only sixty-seven days!

When the filming of *Casablanca* began in late May, 1942, only the first half of the script was ready but both producer Wallis and director Curtiz were anxious to get under way with the shooting. They were confident that the three writers, the brothers Julius and Philip Epstein and Howard Koch, would be able to complete the second half of the script as the filming went along, in proper sequence, from beginning to end. Their confidence was a little misplaced at times because the final ending of the film was not decided upon until the last few days of the film work! That, I think, was the most unusual feature of this film. The script actually was written from day to day, and none of the actors on the set knew what the next day's action would entail. One of the stars of the film, the charming and lovely Ingrid Bergman, said much later that she and the other actors actually did not know how the story would end until the final scene was completed.

Another witness to this script problem was the very talented Julius Epstein, one of the three writers assigned to the *Casablanca* screenplay. As Michael Freedland describes it in his fascinating book: "Finding a proper ending for the movie was like a jigsaw puzzle. We threw the pieces up into the air, and watched where they fell. We weren't sure how it was going to end until it was all finished!"<sup>6</sup>

And yet the film, strangely enough, seemed to be thoroughly planned and prepared well in advance, and the action and dialogue flowed along smoothly and perfectly. The scenes and action seemed to mesh together flawlessly.

During the continuing discussion about possible endings for the film, two of the actors made a suggestion that was accepted by director Curtiz.

6. *The Warner Brothers*, by Michael Freedland. St. Martin's Press, 1983.

This was in regard to the important scene near the end of the film where Major Strasser hurries by car to the airport, determined at all costs to stop the airplane from departing Casablanca with the Laszlos. The script called for Bogart, as Rick, to shoot Major Strasser in the back as the major attempted to call for the police. Both Bogart and Veidt objected to this approach, feeling that it wasn't in character for Rick to kill a man in that way. Bogart suggested that Major Strasser attempt to pull his pistol first, and then Rick could shoot the Nazi in self-defense.

At this point Curtiz wasn't convinced. To Bogart's loud and somewhat gruff arguments Veidt added his own, more softly but in an equally convincing manner. He stated: "Mike, I think it would be in keeping with my character as a Nazi fanatic to attempt one last sneak attack." Curtiz agreed to give the idea a trial rehearsal.

As Bogart and Veidt staged it, Strasser, while holding the telephone in one hand and attempting to call for reinforcements, uses his other hand to remove his pistol from his holster. He fires one quick round at Rick, narrowly missing him. Rick then fires at Strasser, hitting him, and Strasser slumps to the ground. Curtiz liked the result. The script was then altered with this change incorporated for the final take.

This was but one example of Veidt's interest in the directorial side of the filming. Conrad thoroughly enjoyed his work as an actor. But he also enthusiastically enjoyed the challenge of the technical part of the production of a motion picture in which he was participating.

Veidt had a remarkable sixth sense regarding a scene in a play or a film. He knew intuitively whether a particular scene was producing the maximum effect. He would ask himself: "Does this scene 'play' well?" Or, "Does the dialogue ring true?" Or, "are the players expressing emotion or just going through their paces in a wooden manner?" If not satisfied, he would suggest a corrective measure to the problem.

On many film sets, depending on the director's attitude, Conrad (and the rest of the cast) would frequently help with the solving of difficulties that arose in the shooting. For instance, Veidt would often offer a suggestion as to how a certain scene could be shot so as to heighten the dramatic effect. Perhaps, Conrad would say, using a different camera angle here, or improvising a different approach to an actor's movements, or altering the lighting to improve the atmosphere, making it coincide with the mood of the story, would be better.

Veidt's extensive experience in motion pictures, working for many

different directors, gave him considerable expertise and authentic credentials in this field. But Conrad was always carefully tactful about suggesting changes in the script or camera work, etc., limiting his suggestions to those directors he knew quite well. Veidt found F.W. Murnau and Mike Curtiz especially receptive to ideas from the cast and from the cameramen and scriptwriters. In this way, Veidt and the other production members felt that they had made a valuable contribution to the film, when one of their ideas was accepted and adopted into the script. Veidt especially was overjoyed when a suggestion of his was found to be suitable and useful as a solution to some difficult problem. Thus, he felt he was giving more of himself than just being an actor simply following the director's orders. The result was a team effort, and the film was almost always much better for it.

There were some directors, however, who frowned on any suggestions from mere actors. They violently resented any assistance from the cast and considered such behavior by an actor as interference with a director's sacred prerogatives!

As for *Casablanca*, it deservedly earned the Academy Award for the Best Motion Picture of the Year.

One of the best parts of this remarkable film was the lovely melody and beautiful words of the song *As Time Goes By*. It's a strange thing that this song, which debuted in 1931, never seemed to catch on with the public until it was included in *Casablanca's* soundtrack in 1942, and then it really caught on. It was at or near the top of the Hit Parade charts for several weeks. Who can forget these memorable lyrics?

"You must remember this,  
a kiss is still a kiss.  
A sigh is just a sigh.  
The fundamental things apply,  
as time goes by.

And when two lovers woo,  
they still say "I love you."  
On that you can rely.  
No matter what the future  
brings, as time goes by."

As a general rule, movie theme songs are forgotten after their film vehicle has been exhibited and then retired to the studio film vaults. But *As Time Goes By* has stayed alive in the public memory since *Casablanca* first came out.

The great musical score by Max Steiner was a major contributor to the film's huge success. It might be noted, though, that Steiner was at first against the use of *As Time Goes By*. He felt that it was an ordinary and commonplace melody and not up to the quality of the film! He later changed his mind and did a first-class job of handling the musical background of this very special film.

As a matter of fact, this song has remained so well remembered by generations of moviegoers and TV viewers that Ingrid Bergman made the remark years later that she couldn't walk into a nightclub without hearing the lovely and familiar strains of *As Time Goes By*, as the orchestra played the song in her honor.

For a bit of "What if...?" trivia regarding the casting of *Casablanca*, the starring roles were not originally assigned to Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, and Paul Henreid. In the early stages of planning and casting, Warners had planned to cast Ronald Reagan, Ann Sheridan, and Dennis Morgan in the three top roles, since they had these three actors under studio contract. What if they had completed the motion picture with these three actors in the respective roles of Rick Blaine, Ilsa Lund, and Victor Laszlo? Do you think the cinematic effect would have been the same? Do you think the film would have been the outstanding success that it turned out to be? Although Reagan, Morgan, and Sheridan are all very competent, attractive, and popular actors, with considerable cinema experience, it is difficult to visualize them in these starring roles. They just don't seem to fit the parts, or generate the same excitement as Bogart, Bergman, and Henreid. They don't seem to possess that indefinable but absolutely necessary quality of charisma.

The three writers had to work frantically on the script to keep pace with the daily filming schedule expected by the hard-driving director, Curtiz. As the filming approached the final shooting days, producer Wallis ordered director Curtiz to prepare two separate story endings. A committee, consisting of Wallis, Curtiz, the three writers, and a few others, were then to view the "rushes" of the two possible endings and decide which seemed the better.

When someone at the committee meeting suggested that perhaps the

two potential endings might not be logical, director Curtiz reportedly said, in his Hungarian-accented, slightly broken-English manner: "Don't worry what's logical! I make it go so fast no body vill notice!"

As William R. Meyer so aptly described it in his excellent book: "Fortunately, Curtiz never spends too much time on one aspect or character in a given scene. It's something like a merry-go-round of drama—everything is there and everything whizzes by just slow enough to allow a glimpse."<sup>8</sup>

One possible ending had Ilsa and Victor Laszlo boarding the plane for Lisbon. The alternative version had Rick and Ilsa leaving Casablanca on the plane. As millions of viewers of this famous and memorable photoplay now know, the decision was made for Ilsa and Victor Laszlo to fly away to freedom, leaving Rick and Captain Renault behind.

In the final dramatic confrontation scene at the airport Major Strasser and Rick exchange gunfire and Strasser is mortally wounded. As Major Strasser lies dying on the airport runway, Captain Renault once more utters the famous line, telling his policemen to "round up the usual suspects." Then Victor and Ilsa fly away to freedom and Rick and Captain Renault walk away together, to join the Free French forces in the French colonial town of Brazzaville. Rick then delivers the final line to Renault, saying: "Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Also at about this time the camera zooms in to show Captain Renault tossing a bottle of *Vichy* water into a trash can, thereby symbolically and literally cutting his allegiance to the Vichy government of the collaborationist French.

Filming on *Casablanca* ended in early August, 1942, on schedule but well over the allotted budget. It is not widely known but an additional scene was nearly tacked on to the end of the film. When the film was previewed by several test audiences, a large number of audience members gave highly favorable opinions about the film but also stated their interest in what happened to Rick Blaine and Louis Renault after they left the Casablanca airport. Producer Wallis, accepting the preview audiences' comments and suggestions, decided to shoot a brief epilogue, with Bogart and Rains in French military uniform, aboard a ship, obviously en route to continue the battle against the Nazis in North Africa.

Before this epilogue could be completed, however, world events took

8. *Warner Brothers Directors*, by William R. Meyer. Arlington House, 1978.



a hand. Allied forces landed in Casablanca as part of the North African campaign. Studio boss Jack Warner, who recognized the tremendous value of this free world-wide publicity, made the decision to cancel the proposed epilogue and release the film as soon as possible. This was done and the film was able to cash in on the real-life current events in that corner of the world, as the name *Casablanca* was in the news daily.

Film trivia buffs in general, and admirers of this film classic in particular, will be interested to know that most of *Casablanca* was shot in the Los Angeles area. Because of the volatile and dangerous wartime situation in Morocco, Warner Brothers could not send the film cast and crew on location to Casablanca. Instead, they chose the San Fernando Valley north of Los Angeles, which has a climate similar to that of Casablanca. Two of the most memorable scenes in the film—when Major Strasser arrives by plane in Casablanca and the final climactic scene—took place at the Van Nuys airport. The hangar is still there today and is still recognizable as such, even though it is now in use by an office furniture manufacturer.

The original plan was to produce *Casablanca* on a rather modest budget; a typical Grade B programmer, perhaps just an average melodrama with an exotic locale. As the budget increased and the quality of the international cast grew to distinguished proportions, however, Jack Warner, Hal Wallis, and Michael Curtiz realized that they had a potentially great motion picture in the making. As it turned out, *Casablanca* may be considered the most famous and enduring film product of all time from the Warner Brothers studio.

It should be mentioned that in 1992, during the 50th anniversary of the release of *Casablanca*, many theaters throughout the United States scheduled screenings of this classic film. In so doing, considerable new interest in Veidt and much new acclaim for Veidt was noted among the latest generation of moviegoers to fall under his spell.

As further proof of the popularity and respect gained by the film *Casablanca*, it should be noted that the British Film Institute conducted a survey of its members in 1983. The purpose of the survey was to select the "30 Best Movies of All Time." Out of some two thousand film nominees, *Casablanca* was the number-one choice by an overwhelming majority.

Parenthetically, Mike Curtiz (formerly Mihaly Kertecz of Hungary) has become a legend in Hollywood, not only for his outstanding film work,

but as a rival of Sam Goldwyn in the use (or mis-use) of the English language. Both men are noted for their colorful and hilarious malapropisms and odd choice of words. Many of Curtiz' famous expressions have been passed down to us, and I cite a few of them here.

One occurred in 1936 during Curtiz' direction of the film *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. After a particularly dramatic battle sequence, Curtiz wanted to heighten the scene still further by showing a riderless cavalry horse trotting by on the battlefield. Curtiz called out to one of his stagehands: "Bring me an empty horse!"

Another incident involved actor James Cagney, who was scolded by Curtiz as to the proper way to portray a certain scene. Curtiz shouted to Cagney: "Don't do it the way I showed you; do it the way I mean!"

The third malapropism occurred one day when Curtiz was directing a romantic scene with an actor and an actress who were sitting on a park bench. Curtiz advised them to come a "little closer together apart."

Another slip of the tongue occurred on the set one day when Curtiz was praising a certain horror film to a friend. He said: "Dis film vill make your blood *cwr!*"

The final classic Curtiz comment occurred after *Casablanca* was completed. Director Curtiz, his voice filled with pride, told studio boss Jack Warner: "I think dis film vill be the *pinochle* of my movie career!"

Although Veidt was of similar Central European extraction as were Curtiz (nee Kertecz) and Goldwyn (nee Goldfish), he managed to lose much of his heavy Germanic accent. Through the course of his language studies, as well as his years of residence in America and England, Conrad's English became remarkably smooth, lucid, and precise. There was only a slight trace of the accent left, just enough to enhance his exotic appeal.

While Conrad was at work on the filming of *Casablanca* in 1942, more than six thousand miles away from Hollywood, in Switzerland, an event occurred that was disgusting and traumatic for Conrad's daughter, Viola. Viola had been summoned for an interview at the German Consulate in Geneva.

Viola was almost seventeen at this time and had bloomed into a very attractive young woman. Upon her arrival, Viola was ushered into the large, elegant office of the German Consul General. Dominating the entire room was a huge portrait of a stern-visaged Adolf Hitler. The Consul General stood at attention, clicked his heels, and said, "Heil Hitler," to which Viola did not reply in kind. The Consul General then

repeated that Nazi greeting, in a much louder voice, to which Miss Veidt pointedly said only "Good Day" in German. Viola was then seated in a large, high-backed chair facing the Consul's desk.

At this moment a young German man entered the room, clicked his heels, shouted "Heil Hitler," and stood stiffly at attention to the rear of Viola's chair. The conversation then went something like this: Consul: "Fräulein Veidt, you are German born and are eligible for your passport to Germany, even though your father, Conrad Veidt, is an Enemy Alien."

The Consul then instructed the young man to bring Miss Veidt's dossier to him, and he then began leafing through the thick book, making disapproving noises as he did so, and glancing sharply at Viola from time to time. Viola was both stunned and angry that the Nazis had compiled a dossier on herself and her family, but she said nothing.

Consul: "Fräulein Veidt, are you happy in Switzerland?"

Viola: "Yes."

Consul: "Do you have enough money to be comfortable?"

Viola: "Yes."

Consul: "Oh, I know your father provides for you very generously from the money he gets for his anti-German films, but I also know that the Swiss government rations foreigners financially. I have here documents that prove that there are no Jews or insanity in the Veidt family for over five generations. As you can see, Fräulein Veidt, we have conducted very thorough and intensive research on your family. How would you like to return to the Fatherland to promote the German Master Race? Surely you agree with our Führer's plans for Germany? You will be provided with a large villa and enough money to keep you comfortable in the style that you have become accustomed to. Of course, if the partner we have chosen for you (and here the Consul nodded toward the young man standing behind Viola's chair) does not please you, we can arrange for artificial insemination! And you may keep the child until the age of six. After that, the State will take over the rearing of your child, for service to the Fatherland. What do you say, Fräulein Veidt?"

Viola was unable at first to say anything. She was overcome with fear and loathing and was almost numb. She couldn't believe that this was happening to her. She simply stood up, glared at the Consul General and the young man who represented the Master Race, and blurted out: "I won't! I can't believe that anyone can sink so low! I am not a brood sow! May I go now?"

Both men clicked their heels, and shouted "Heil Hitler" as Viola almost ran from the room. Before she could arrive home, Viola vomited from the trauma of the incident. On arrival at home Viola told her mother what had happened at the German Consulate. She never told her father of the incident, not wishing to upset him or worry him.

As corroboration of Viola's unpleasant experience, readers interested in this aspect of Nazism may refer to Bernt Engelmann's fascinating book.<sup>9</sup> An independent research survey conducted soon after World War II had ended showed that, in fact, there was a Nazi program designed to create thousands of Aryan children for Germany. This program was a pet project of Gestapo leader Heinrich Himmler. His plan was to seek out Nordic-appearing young men and women (tall, with blond hair and blue eyes) who would be brought together for the express purpose of "fulfilling a noble duty by producing Aryan children for the Fatherland." As one SS leader expressed it: "With this program, in thirty years, we shall have six hundred more regiments!"

This was in addition to Hitler's earlier program to encourage childbearing in Germany, in which medals were awarded to the most prolific women. A "Mother's Cross," in classifications of Gold, Silver, and Bronze, was awarded in much publicized ceremonies to wives who gave birth to the most children.

Later, in 1942, MGM released *Nazi Agent*, the excellent melodrama about a German spy network in which Veidt played the difficult dual roles of twin brothers Hugo and Otto.

At the beginning of the filming of *Nazi Agent*, there was an elaborate bit of good-natured jesting on the MGM set. The victim of this prank was the star of the film, Conrad Veidt. The perpetrators and conspirators were three of the cameramen on the set: the chief cameraman Harry Stradling, and his two assistants, Sam Minski and Bobby Moreno. The other personnel on the set were aware of what was going on and went along with the gag.

As Conrad came onto the studio set that first morning, prepared to receive his day's instructions from the director, Jules Dassin, he noticed three outlandish-appearing individuals by the camera equipment. They were dressed in Russian-style clothing (fur hats, boots, Russian insignia, etc.) and were wearing long, thick beards. When they began giving Veidt

9. *In Hitler's Germany*, by Bernt Engelmann. Random House, 1986.



Conrad's daughter, Viola, is seen here, with her cat (which she named "George Bush") in a photo taken at her home in Key West, Florida. Miss Veidr graciously granted a lengthy interview to the author and supplied many of the photographs shown in this book.

orders, in a simulated Russian language, and behaving in a strange manner, bumping into their camera equipment and dropping things in a pretense of clumsiness, Conrad became quite concerned. He finally refused to work with them, believing that they didn't know what they were doing and weren't authorized to be on the set.

At this point Conrad spoke to the director, Jules Dassin, and the producer, Irving Asher, about the odd trio of "cameramen." Finally, the joke was explained to Conrad: the spurious "Russians" removed their fake beards, and other trappings (all of which had come from the studio wardrobe department). At this time Conrad broke out in a hearty laugh, realizing that he had been the victim of the joke and enjoying the extravagant prank that had been played on him. What's interesting about this is that the prank produced a worthwhile result—after everybody had had their laugh, the cast and the film crew became friendlier, closer, and worked better together thereafter.

In the film, Otto was able to deceive almost everyone at the German consulate, while posing as his twin brother, the Nazi spy leader, Baron Hugo. But he could not deceive the young woman Karen (well played by Ann Ayars), who is attracted to Otto and senses the difference in character between Otto and Hugo.

Neither could Otto deceive Hugo's valet, an old family retainer, who recognized a tell-tale scar on Otto's shoulder. Frank Reicher (a veteran actor and director on stage and screen) gave a superior performance as the loyal valet. The cast also boasted the efforts of Martin Kosleck, Sidney Blackmer, and Marc Lawrence. Jules Dassin directed this intriguing spy genre thriller with verve and skill. The film had excellent story movement and dialogue.

The famous film critic, Bosley Crowther, wrote in his June 13, 1942, column in the *New York Times*: "Nazi Agent had a lot more to it than some costlier thrill-builders in the line. I advise audiences to keep their hands gloved or pocketed when viewing this film or else their fingernails will go!"

After completion of work on this film, Conrad was asked by an old friend if he didn't sometimes miss the applause and atmosphere and excitement of the legitimate theater. Conrad replied: "Yes, sometimes I do. But in films I have found a new narcotic, so to speak. I mean the fascinating though playful concept of a double personality. It intrigues me to think that there is another man abroad in the world who resembles me completely. So that I may sit in this room, talking with you, and holding a glass of scotch and soda in my hand, while that image of me is somewhere swaying audiences in darkened theaters with an impression of love, or hate, or deceit, or pity, or other emotions. There, too, is an actor's sense of power, and one feels it as surely as any applause that is heard."

Conrad felt another consideration in favor of the cinema over the legitimate theater was the relative permanence of film compared to stage plays. Conrad appreciated the fact that studios, museums, and libraries have been preserving thousands of films, from the early pioneer motion pictures to the present day's output. As a result a motion picture actor can feel some sense of immortality as his films are shown again and again to new audiences each year. In this regard, Conrad liked to quote a discerning comment once made by the eminent 19th Century American thespian, Edwin Booth: "A stage actor is a sculptor who carves in snow."

Veidt's last film was the MGM thriller *Above Suspicion*, which again starred him with Joan Crawford. Also starring in this fine motion picture were Fred MacMurray and Basil Rathbone. This was released in 1943 and was very well received by critics and filmgoers alike. For a rare change, Veidt was not cast as the villain in this scenario, but assisted the hero and heroine in their escape from Nazi Germany. The plot concerned an



Veidt was excellent in the dual role of twin brothers in the 1942 spy melodrama from MGM *Nazi Agent*. Veidt portrayed a gentle, loyal American of German descent who tries to expose the spy ring masterminded by his twin brother. Ann Ayars (center) supplies the love interest in this fascinating story.

American (MacMurray) and his new bride (Crawford) who are on their honeymoon, traveling in Europe, just prior to World War II. They are asked by the British and American secret service to ascertain a vitally needed secret by undertaking a mission to Germany. There they are to obtain plans of a new secret weapon and to search for and locate a missing Allied intelligence agent. In so doing, they become involved in very exciting adventures. This spy mission makes for thrilling entertainment and suspense; an excellent film by any standards. Veidt gave a fine, ingratiating performance in the role of Count Seidel, who helped the American couple elude the pursuing Nazis. The final scenes in which he helps them cross the border from Austria into Italy and to safety are particularly exciting and well done. Richard Thorpe did an outstanding job of directing. Others in the skillful cast were Felix Bressart and Reginald Owen.

There was an interesting sidelight for Conrad in the filming of *Above*

*Suspicion*. During the shooting of the escape scenes, Conrad confided to director Richard Thorpe that the screenplay of this film struck a responsive chord in his own life. Conrad went on to relate that the script brought back special memories for himself as he had helped his wife's parents escape from the Nazi oppression. It was in 1935 that Veidt had arranged for the elderly couple to cross over the Swiss frontier from Austria. So that when Conrad, as Count Seidel in this film, assisted the young American couple in the perilous border crossing, it was a bit of *deja vu* for him.

Veidt's co-star in *Above Suspicion*, Joan Crawford, said that Conrad was "a brilliant actor and a fine man." She went on to say that "Mr. Veidt's acting helped greatly to inspire me. I had never seen an actor with such dramatic intensity or such concentration and purpose in his acting." Although Miss Crawford was an experienced and veteran actress, having acted in films since 1925, she admitted that working with Veidt in two films had been an extremely rewarding acting lesson for her.

Incidentally, Conrad would never see *Above Suspicion* in its entirety. He did view some of the "rushes" or "dailies" of the film, but the final prints, ready for commercial distribution, weren't released until April 28, 1943 (twenty-five days after Conrad had passed away).

From 1940 to 1943, Conrad was one of the busiest actors in Hollywood, with little free time between the completion of one film and the start of another. He took part in eight films during that period. But Conrad's superb acting ability vastly exceeded the artificial limits Hollywood placed on him by labeling him as merely a "character actor." Actually, Hollywood didn't quite know what to do with Conrad. Although the top studio executives such as Louis B. Mayer (MGM), Jack Warner (Warner Bros.), Harry Cohn (Columbia), and Carl Laemmle (Universal) recognized and respected Conrad's skill, they were unable (or unwilling) to find suitable first-rate roles in quality productions for him. Frequently, they assigned Conrad to substandard screenplays, low-budget productions and second-rate directors.





Conrad Veidt's last film, released in 1943, was the fascinating spy thriller *Above Suspicion*. In this still, Veidt (right) is seen with Fred MacMurray and Joan Crawford.

## 24

### The Final Curtain

AFTER THE CONSIDERABLE SUCCESS of Veidt's cinematic efforts from 1940 to 1943, films such as *Casablanca*, *Above Suspicion*, *The Men in Her Life*, *Escape*, and *A Woman's Face*, all of which did very well commercially and critically, Veidt was in great demand and plans were in the offing for more roles for him. Offers were coming in from MGM as well as the other leading film studios in Hollywood. Casting directors visualized Veidt in several more motion pictures which were on the "drawing boards" at this time. An event was to occur on a Hollywood golf course on April 3, 1943, however, that would alter all such plans.

On the evening of April 2, 1943, Conrad and his wife, Lily, were invited to a large party to be held at the palatial estate in Beverly Hills of one of Hollywood's biggest movie moguls. As Conrad was "between pictures" at this particular time, and therefore didn't have to report to the studio early the next morning for film shooting, he and Lily decided to accept the party invitation. Among the many party-goers present were two of Conrad's long-time friends, Greta Garbo and Clark Gable. There were many other famous film stars and directors present, as well as others who were destined to become famous later in their careers.

Conrad had a convivial and gregarious nature, and he liked nothing better than attending parties with other congenial friends. He enjoyed the feasting, the drinking, the dancing, and the witty conversation and repartee of the party-goers. Conrad, in his later years, was never one to drink to excess but he did like to have a few glasses of his favorite alcoholic beverage "Berliner Weisse," imported from Germany especially for him. This was a light colored beer made from wheat. It had a rather mild taste, and it was very popular in and around Berlin. It had very little alcohol in it. When this special beer was not available, Conrad would opt for a scotch and soda.

After having had a pleasant time at the party, and after thanking their host profusely, Conrad and Lily left sometime between one a.m. and two a.m. They arrived home shortly after that and immediately retired for the night.

The next morning, April 3, 1943, Conrad was awakened rather early by a phone call. It was from his friend, Arthur Field, a prominent producer from MGM. Mr. Field invited Conrad to play a round of golf in a twosome with him. Conrad loved playing golf only slightly less than he enjoyed attending parties, so he accepted the invitation eagerly, even though he was still somewhat sleepy from the previous night's festivities. Conrad tried to ignore the headache he had, and also the dull but persistent pain in his chest, attributing them to the previous night's insufficient sleep. He planned to take a nap in the afternoon, to make up for the overactive prior evening and this morning's golf game.

Although Conrad appeared to be in robust good health in all of his films, he was nevertheless suffering from a serious heart condition. During the last several years of his life, Conrad experienced occasional paroxysmal attacks of chest pain. Conrad took medication for his heart ailment, prescribed by his physician, in the form of nitroglycerin tablets which helped considerably to relieve the pain. But the fact that Conrad was an extremely heavy cigarette smoker all of his adult life exacerbated his angina pectoris.

Lily begged Conrad to give up his almost constant cigarette smoking but Conrad's attempts to stop smoking always failed. Conrad and Lily tried to keep his medical condition a secret from film industry executives so that Conrad could continue acting in motion pictures. Conrad felt that he needed to keep busy and that without his lifelong devotion to acting, and without the opportunity to act in new and exciting film roles offered to him, life for him would be meaningless. Although Conrad was subject to the chest pains from time to time, they didn't completely incapacitate him, either in his work or in recreational activities, such as his favorite sport of golf.

Incidentally, there was a family precedent for Conrad's medical problem. Conrad's mother also died at an early age, fifty-six, and also from a heart attack.

As Conrad and Arthur Field drove to the Riviera Country Club golf course, they chatted amiably about a prospective film role that MGM was considering for Conrad. Conrad expressed enthusiastic interest in the role.

Soon after their arrival at the golf course, the two men teed off, after placing a small bet on the outcome of their golf game that day.

As they played along, Conrad continued to experience the pain in his left chest but he tried to ignore it. On their arrival at the eighth hole, however, Arthur heard Conrad gasp in great pain, and then he saw Conrad fall to the ground. Arthur immediately ran to Conrad's side to offer help. Realizing that Conrad had suffered a massive heart attack, and being aware that Conrad's physician, Dr. Joseph E. Bergmann, was also playing golf on this same course that morning, Arthur asked some nearby golfers to locate and summon Dr. Bergmann to Conrad's side. Dr. Bergmann examined Conrad and did all that he could to resuscitate him but all his efforts to revive Conrad were unsuccessful. In the meantime an ambulance had been called for and Conrad was soon sped to the Santa Monica Hospital. There all possible efforts were administered to revive him. But this also failed and the doctors in attendance pronounced Conrad dead. On the stage of *Life*, the lights had dimmed for Conrad Veidt for the last time.

Apparently, the existing heart disease, the chronic cigarette smoking, and the excitement and exertion of the recent party and golfing caused Conrad's severe and final heart attack.

Conrad's sudden death from the massive coronary thrombosis on April 3, 1943, at the age of fifty, came as a severe shock and trauma to all who had known him or had seen his films or his stage work. He was loved and admired and respected by all who knew him.

Conrad's body was cremated, according to his wishes, and the ashes were placed in an urn and later entombed in the Ferncliff Cemetery in Westchester County, New York.

His family was devastated with shock and grief. Conrad's widow, Lily, was so grief-stricken and inconsolable that she suffered a severe nervous breakdown.

On her recovery, Lily told a friend that on the day Conrad died she had seen him off in the morning. Lily said that Conrad went out the door whistling happily, and he waved to her before entering his car. Lily said that she never saw him alive again. What a poignant and bittersweet memory of Conrad remained with Lily from that day!

Among the hundreds of letters and telegrams offering condolences received by Lily were messages from Alfred Hitchcock, Paul Henreid, Greta Garbo, Max Reinhardt, Joan Crawford, Norma Shearer, Ernst

Lubitsch, Emeric Pressburger, George Cukor, Cole Porter, Ann Sothorn, Reinhold Schünzel, Fritz Lang and Fritz Kortner.

In Herr Reinhardt's telegram of condolences to Lily, he mentioned that Conrad had been his first choice for the role of *Faust* in the Salzburg Festivals. He stated further that it was his desire for many years to work again with this outstanding actor and magnificent and beloved man, Conrad. Herr Reinhardt concluded by saying that he deplored the fact that these much-desired stage plays with Conrad had never materialized.

Recently I had a conversation with the great director/screenwriter, Billy Wilder. Mr. Wilder had been a very good friend both of Conrad and Lily Veidt. Mr. Wilder related to me the details of the deplorable funeral service held for Conrad in Los Angeles on that April day in 1943. Normally, the person chosen to deliver the eulogy at a funeral is an old and close friend of the deceased. On this occasion, for some unknown reason, a local minister was selected who didn't know Conrad at all. He began his eulogy by saying: "Mr. Veidt was, I have been told, an actor." (This is somewhat comparable to saying, "Michelangelo was, I believe, a painter.") Then the minister made things worse by continually mispronouncing Conrad's surname all through the service, calling him "Mr. Veet." The whole service was an embarrassing fiasco and it was painful to all of Conrad's friends there. Conrad and Lily deserved far better than this.

Meanwhile, on April 4, 1943, in Geneva, Switzerland, Viola and her mother were listening to the radio news bulletins. First came several reports of war news: bombings of Germany by Allied air forces; German army reverses on the Russian front; and the status of military action in the Pacific war theater. Then came other news of interest to residents of Switzerland. The final news item caused Felicitas and Viola to sit bolt upright. They heard the news commentator say: "The famous English actor, Conrad Veidt, passed away yesterday in Santa Monica, California."

There had often been false or erroneous reports on the radio and in the newspapers and Felicitas and Viola felt that perhaps this was a mistake, too. They kept hoping against hope that this report was untrue. But then three days later a cable came from America, from Lily, for Viola. The cable stated briefly: "To my greatest sorrow I must tell you that your father died of a massive coronary. I know he died thinking of you, as he always did. Love, Lily." Viola was unable to come to the United States to attend the funeral. Viola was absolutely sick with grief and sorrow, as she had loved her father more than anyone in the world.

Lily was so shattered by Conrad's passing that she grieved for years and never remarried. She later became a theatrical talent agent in New York and traveled often between Europe and America in the course of her work. When I talked to Lily in the 1960s she was still a very attractive woman and a very charming and gracious person. I was greatly saddened to learn that Lily Veidt had passed away in 1980. A close friend, Eduard Wallach, of New York, had been appointed as executor of Lily's estate. Lily had requested in her will that her body be cremated and that her ashes be intermingled with the ashes of her husband. Lily's will also requested that the combined ashes of Conrad and Lily be sent to Lily's nephew in California for safekeeping. Mr. Wallach made the necessary arrangements and these requests were carried out.

Many years later, in 1993, the nephew of Lily Veidt, Mr. Ivan J. Rado, decided it would be appropriate to have the intermingled ashes of Conrad and Lily Veidt transported to Germany for interment in a suitable location in Conrad's home town of Berlin. Mr. Rado personally escorted the remains of his aunt and uncle to Berlin and made the necessary arrangements for interment. By this action, Conrad would, in a sense, be "coming home" to his beloved Berlin after a long period of exile. The timing was particularly appropriate since the year 1993 marked two notable anniversaries: the one hundredth anniversary of Conrad's birth and the fiftieth anniversary of his death. This anniversary year was celebrated in Berlin, London, Paris, and New York with special retrospective festivals honoring Conrad Veidt's life and career, with well-attended showings of his films in museums in those cities.

Not long after Conrad's death, a good friend of his, Hans Kafka, wrote a letter to the editor of a Los Angeles newspaper, to express his sorrow and to relate an amusing incident that gives a glimpse of Conrad's personality. Mr. Kafka related that a few days before the tragic last golf game, Conrad had attended a dinner party at Greta Keller's house. At that time Conrad was his usual lively and witty self. Later in the evening the hostess suggested that the guests play a new parlor game, of the personality quizz type, called "Who Am I?" Many guests took part and everyone seemed to be enjoying the game. Then came Conrad's turn, and the other players decided to tease Conrad a little by choosing Conrad's own personality and career as the solution to be guessed by Conrad.

Conrad stood up and began asking his questions, in accordance with the game rules. Just a few of the questions Conrad asked, and the strange

answers he received, are as follows:

Q: What kind of period costume would the person in question like?

A: Rococo period; either an abbot's frock or a cavalier's uniform.

Q: What kind of shoes would this person wear?

A: Prussian officer's boots.

Q: What kind of music would this person like?

A: Chopin's piano music.

Q: If this person were to invite three historical personalities, whom would he most likely select?

A: Landru, Krishnamurti, Beau Brummel.

At this point Conrad said, in a pained voice, "Now stop that! That's all nonsense and contradictory! Chopin and Prussian boots! A rococo period abbot and Landru, the notorious French murderer! Krishnamurti, a living Buddha, and Beau Brummel, the English dandy! That can't cover one personality!"

No longer able to suppress their laughter or conceal the puzzling answer, the other players then told Conrad that *he* was the character in question and it was *his* personality and *his* acting career which encompassed so many disparate and seemingly contradictory traits. Conrad admitted, somewhat sheepishly, that the other players were correct in their descriptive answers to his questions.

Mr. Kafka concluded his touching letter by writing that Conrad "had a brilliant artistic personality and was a kind-hearted man and a great virtuoso." I think everybody who knew Conrad Veidt would agree with that statement.

Toward the end of his long acting career, Conrad Veidt expressed himself eloquently about his choice of a life work: "To me it has been a very great pleasure to play so many roles in the cinema over the years. I am not certain whether my interpretations of these characters have met with general approval. At any rate, I hope they have entertained and pleased the audiences. Under the inspiring direction of many talented film directors, I gave of my best. I must therefore content myself with the old saying from the Roman poet/philosopher, Ovid, "In magnis et voluisse sat est"—"In great things, even to have willed is enough!"



"What use is there for a biography of myself? I'm just a movie actor."

*Laurence Olivier*



## 25

### Epilogue

"All the world's a stage  
and all the men and women  
merely players.

They have their exits and entrances  
and one man in his time plays many parts."  
—Shakespeare

**T**HUS PASSED AWAY a towering figure in the world of stage and cinema. One who would be remembered as long as mankind would respect and appreciate artistic talent. Although it is many years now since his passing, the fascination of his magnetic personality remains with us. Frequently his films are shown on television or presented in film clubs and art museums throughout the world.

In the Germany that once renounced him (only the Nazi government, not the German people collectively) there are thousands of movie fans who appreciate Veidt's acting skill. Some were members of Veidt's generation. But most of these Veidt fans are new followers; younger persons who weren't living in Conrad's lifetime, but who have discovered his unique acting style as Veidt's old films are re-shown.

Unfortunately, many of his early films have been lost or damaged irreparably, due to the war, neglect, and loss by fire because of the highly flammable nature of the old nitrate film stock that Veidt's motion pictures had been filmed on. To the best of my knowledge there are prints of about forty-nine Veidt films still in existence today. (See Filmography section of this book.)

Still, Veidt, in his twenty-six years of acting, left a great legacy to

students of film history. His consummate skill as an actor brought and still brings enjoyment and entertainment to millions of filmgoers. He was such an accomplished and versatile thespian that he could portray any number of characterizations with great success and remarkable sincerity. He often had the role of a suave, cultured European gentleman or nobleman, displaying great poise and charm. Later, in the World War II era of the late 1930s and early 1940s, he was stereotyped as the quintessential ruthless and arrogant German military officer, the personification of the Nazi enemy and Gestapo type.

How ironic it is that Veidt, who was a stalwart anti-Nazi in real life, and who chose exile from his beloved native land rather than live under the Nazi boot, would be selected by American and British producers to portray Nazi officers and spies, and would end his career in such a role.

During Veidt's period of exile from Germany (1933-1943) he became an important symbol of the international resistance to the Nazi movement. His anti-Nazi films, his monetary donations to the British war effort, and his personal appearances and radio plays with anti-Nazi themes, all helped raise British, American, and Allied citizens' morale. Although Veidt didn't live to see the final Allied victory in 1945, his many contributions added to the Allied determination to see the long war through to its victorious conclusion.

Because Veidt had excelled in portraying unforgettably villainous characters over the years, perhaps the majority of his legions of admirers would have preferred him to continue doing so. But there was also a large contingent of Veidt fans who would have liked to see Conrad in sympathetic roles, roles in which he was the gallant hero who not only defeated the hated enemy but also won the beautiful girl.

Film and art critic Florence B. Lennon once wrote a brief but touching eulogy of Conrad Veidt. She wrote: "If ever there was an actor equally fitted to play both Faust and Mephistopheles, it was Veidt." Ms. Lennon concluded her encomium with this statement: "It is a blow to the art of the motion picture that just the one actor with an infinite capacity for growth in all branches of this art should have been cut off so untimely soon."

Conrad Veidt had the consummate talent, the inspiration, and the will to impart to his roles the full characterization desired by the directors and producers, with superb results. At least three of Veidt's performances will rank high among the supreme examples of artistic acting in world

cinema. These three are his portrayal of Cesare in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* in 1919; of Czar Ivan the Terrible in *Waxworks* in 1924; and as the student Baldwin in *The Student of Prague* in 1926. For the devoted cinephile and the serious student of film history, Conrad Veidt occupies a special place in motion picture lore. Of course, not all of Veidt's films have been notable or memorable motion pictures, but Veidt's performances have never been less than excellent. Veidt was able to put the stamp of his own unique personality into all of his screen roles.

A succinct but touching tribute to Conrad was made by the man who aided Conrad's film career immensely by selecting him in 1919 for the memorable role of Cesare in the landmark Expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. In April, 1943, in his obituary letter about Conrad's death, pioneer producer Erich Pommer wrote: "It is difficult to decide which we should admire most, Conrad's artistry or his humanity!"

In the summer of 1975, a well-deserved and long-overdue recognition was accorded to Veidt's memory. In Germany a sincere tribute was rendered to Veidt as a major part of the Berlin Film Festival. I thought it rather touching, and altogether fitting, that this retrospective honor should take place in the land of Conrad's birth, and in his home town of Berlin. The Veidt retrospective program was divided into two parts. The first, and larger, part was held from June 27 to July 8, 1975, and consisted of the showing of fifteen Veidt films: *Der Reigen*; *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*; *The Black Hussar*; *Unheimliche Geschichten*; *Lucrezia Borgia*; *Die Bruder Schellenberg*; *Die Andere Seite*; *The Man Who Murdered*; *Der Gang in die Nacht*; *Hands of Orlac*; *The Violinist of Florence*; *Congress Dances*; *The Indian Tomb*; *The Student of Prague*; and *Waxworks*.

The second part was held from June 25 to July 6, 1976, and consisted of the showing of nine Veidt films: *Rasputin*; *Ich und die Kaiserin*; *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*; *Jew Süß*; *The Man Who Laughs*; *The Thief of Bagdad*; *A Woman's Face*; *King of the Damned*; and *The Last Company*.

Also information about Veidt's life and film career was made available to the public. So with this exhibition of a fine representative selection of films, a splendid retrospective tribute to Veidt was conducted for Veidt fans, old and new.

As part of this laudatory ceremony for Conrad Veidt at the Berlin Film Festival, a speech was made by Mr. Charles Ford, Honorary President of

the International Union of Film Critics. I include a portion of his fine speech herewith:

"Conrad Veidt belonged to that brilliant company of actors who carried to the ends of the world the fame of the German cinematographic school at the time of the double triumph of Expressionism and Realism. With his strange and attractive looks, his haunted expression, and especially with his remarkable acting talent, Conrad Veidt was the ideal protagonist for those persons dear to the Expressionistic filmmakers: slaves or victims of the occult, playthings of dark forces and fatality. But at the same time Conrad Veidt distinguished himself from his colleagues by a romanticism special to him, and which he knew perfectly how to use to advantage.

Conrad Veidt had become an international star, and fate put an end to his career at a moment when we still had every right to expect much of his talent. In spite of the tragic happenings of the time, the news of his death struck film-lovers with consternation, and his premature decease—he was only fifty—caused universal regret. Born in Berlin, Conrad Veidt was a true Berliner, and the festival just had to honor the memory of our famous fellow-citizen, whose name can never be effaced from the history of filmic art."

To sum up Veidt briefly, we could say that he had "class," to put it in the vernacular of today. Or to describe him in the old-fashioned way, Veidt was a gentleman, in all that that implies. Conrad Veidt was an actor par excellence; a loving father; a staunch anti-Nazi; and a fine human being. He was loved, admired, and respected by all who knew him. Conrad Veidt is gone now, to be sure, but his memory lives on with us forever.

To me, he was unforgettable.

## Veldt Filmography

1. *Der Spion (The Spy)* (1917) Dir: Karl Helland; Prod: Frankfurter-film; Cast: Leontine Kühnberg, Ellen Richter, Bruno Lopinski.
2. *Der Weg des Todes (The Road of Death)* (1917) Dir: Robert Reinert; Prod: Deutsche Bioscop; Cast: Maria Carmi, Carl de Vogt. As Rolf.
3. \**Furcht (Fear)* (1917) Dir: Robert Wiene; Prod: Messter-Film; Cast: Bernhard Goetzke, Bruno de Carli, Mechthildis Thein. As the Indian priest.
4. *Das Rätsel von Bangalor (The Mystery of Bangalore)* (1917) Dir: Alexander von Antalfy; Prod: Pax-Film; Cast: Harry Liedtke, Gilda Langer. As Count Dinja.
5. *Wenn Tote Sprechen (When Death Speaks)* (1917) Dir: Robert Reinert; Prod: Deutsche Bioscop; Cast: Maria Carmi.
6. *Die Claudia von Gelserhof* (1917) Dir: Rudolf Biebrach; Prod: Messter-Film; Cast: Henny Porten, Eduard von Winterstein, Paul Hartmann, Lupu Pick.
7. *Das Tagebuch einer Verlorenen (The Diary of a Lost One)* (1918) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Werner Krauss, Erna Morena, Reinhold Schünzel. As Doctor Julius.
8. *Die Serenyl* (1918) Dir: Alfred Halm; Prod: Berliner-Film; Cast: Lya Mara, Erich Kaiseritz.
9. *Dida Ibens Geschichte (Dida Ibsen's Story)* (1918) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Werner Krauss, Anita Berber. As Erick Knorrnsen.
10. *Das Dreimäderlhaus (The House of Three Girls)* (1918) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Anita Berber, Sybille Binder, Kathe Oswald. As Baron Schober.
11. *Es Werde Licht (Let There Be Light)* (1918) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Theodor Loos, Lupu Pick, Paul Hartmann.
12. *Colomba* (1918) Dir: Konrad von Wieder; Prod: Morena-Film; Cast: Erna Morena, Alfred Abel, Werner Krauss. As Henrik van Rhyn.
13. *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte (Jettchen Gebert's Story)* (1918) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Max Gülstorff, Julius Spielmann. As Doctor Köstling. (Sequel)
14. *Henriette Jacoby* (1918) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Max Gülstorff, Julius Spielmann. As Doctor Köstling.

15. *Sündige Mutter* (Sinning Mothers) (1918) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Reinhold Schünzel, Kathe Oswald, Alfred Abel. As Herr Kramer.
16. *Opfer der Gesellschaft* (Society's Victim) (1918) Dir: Willy Grunwald; Prod: Messter-film; Cast: Annaliese Halbe, Kurt Brenkendorf. As Prosecutor Chrysander.
17. *Nocturno der Liebe* (Nocturne of Love) (1918) Dir: Carl Boese; Prod: Nivelli-Film; Cast: Gertrude Welcker, Rita Clermont. As Frederic Chopin.
18. *Die Japanerin* (The Japanese Woman) (1918) Dir: E.A. Dupont; Prod: Stern-Film; Cast: Max Landa, Ria Jende. As the Secretary.
19. *\*Opium* (1919) Dir: Robert Reinert; Prod: Monumental-Film; Cast: Werner Krauss, Hanna Ralph. As Richard Armstrong.
20. *Die Okarina* (The Ocarina) (1919) Dir: Uwe J. Krafft; Prod: Bayerische-Film; Cast: Charlotte Böcklin, Rudolf Lettinger. As Jaap.
21. *Die Prostitution* (Prostitution) (1919) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Werner Krauss, Gussy Holl. As Alfred Werner.
22. *Die Reise um die Erde in 80 Tagen* (Around the World in 80 Days) (1919) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Anita Berber, Reinhold Schünzel, Kathe Oswald. As Phileas Fogg.
23. *Peer Gynt* (1919) Dir: Victor Barnowsky; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Heinz Salfner, Ilka Grüning, Anita Berber. As the Button Maker.
24. *\*Anders als die Andern* (Different from the Others) (1919) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Anita Berber, Reinhold Schünzel, Wilhelm Diegelmann. As Paul Körner.
25. *Die Sich Verkaufen* (Those Who Sell Themselves) (1919) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Reinhold Schünzel, Ilka Grüning. As Editor Hofer.
26. *Die Mexikanerin* (The Mexican Woman) (1919) Dir: Ferdinand Bonn; Prod: Kowo-Film; Cast: Magda Eigen, Kurt Brenkendorf. As the Seducer.
27. *Gepeltscht* (Whipped) (1919) Dir: Carl Boese; Prod: Mosch-Film; Cast: Ria Jende, Friedrich Kühne.
28. *Prinz Kuckuck* (Prince Cuckoo) (1919) Dir: Paul Leni; Prod: Gloria-Film; Cast: Hanna Ralph, Niels Prien, Eric Charell. As Karl Kraker.
29. *\*Unheimliche Geschichten* (Eerie Tales) (1919) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Reinhold Schünzel, Anita Berber, George John. In five different roles: Death, the Assassin, the Traveler, Club President, and the Husband.

30. *Wahnsinn* (Madness) (1919) Dir: Conrad Veidt; Prod: Veidt-Film; Cast: Grit Hegasa, Gussy Holl, Reinhold Schünzel; As Banker Lorenzen.
31. *Satanas* (1919) Dir: F.W. Murnau; Prod: Victoria-Film; Cast: Fritz Kortner, Ernst Hofmann. In three roles: Gubetta, Grodski, and the Hermit.
32. *\*Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari) (1919) Dir: Robert Wiene; Prod: Decla Bioscop; Cast: Werner Krauss, Lili Dagover, Friedrich Feher. As Cesare, the sleepwalker.
33. *Nachtgestalten* (Figures of the Night) (1919) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Bioscop; Cast: Paul Wegener, Erna Morena, Anita Barber, Reinhold Schünzel, Eric Charell. As the Comedian.
34. *Die Nacht auf Goldenhall* (The Night at Goldenhall) (1920) Dir: Conrad Veidt; Prod: Veidt-Film; Cast: Gussy Holl, Esther Hagan, Heinrich Peer. As Lord Harald and the nephew (dual role).
35. *\*Der Reigen* (The Merry-go-Round) (1920) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Bioscop; Cast: Asta Nielsen, Theodor Loos. As Peter Karvan.
36. *Patience* (1920) Dir: Paul Leni; Prod: Gloria-Film; Cast: Marga Kierska, Felix Basch, Adele Sandrock. As Sir Percy Parker.
37. *Gewitter im Mai* (Thunderstorm in May) (1920) Dir: Ludwig Beck; Prod: Münchener Lichtspiel-Film; Cast: Fritz Greiner, Dorian Rene.
38. *Der Januskopf* (The Janus Head) (1920) Dir: F.W. Murnau; Prod: Lipow-Film; Cast: Magnus Stifter, Bela Lugosi, Margarete Schlegel. As Dr. Warren/Mr. O'Connell (dual role).
39. *Liebestaumel* (Love and Passion) (1920) Dir: Martin Hartwig; Prod: Vera-Film; Cast: Maria Zelenka, Heinrich Schroth. As the gypsy, Jalenko.
40. *Die Augen der Welt* (The Eyes of the World) (1920) Dir: Carl Wilhelm; Prod: Terra-Film; Cast: Ressel Oria, Anton Edthofer. As Julian's lover.
41. *Kurfürstendamm* (1920) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Reinhold Schünzel, Asta Nielsen, Erna Morena. As the Devil.
42. *Monitrus* (1920) Dir: Carl Hagen; Prod: Wörner-Film; Cast: Max Landa, Reinhold Schünzel. As Wilmos.
43. *Der Graf von Cagliostro* (The Count of Cagliostro) (1920) Dir: Reinhold Schünzel; Prod: Mico-Film; Cast: Reinhold Schünzel, Anita Barber. As the Minister.
44. *Das Geheimnis von Bombay* (The Mystery of Bombay) (1920) Dir: Arthur Holz; Prod: Decla-Bioscop; Cast: Lili Dagover, Bernard Goetzke. As Tozzi.
45. *Abend, Nacht, und Morgen* (Evening, Night, and the Morning After) (1920) Dir: F.W. Murnau; Prod: Schnelder-Film; Cast: Otto Gebühr, Bruno Ziener.

As Brillburn.

46. *Manolescu's Memoiren* (The Memories of Manolescu) (1920) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Erna Morena, Rudolf Forster. As George Manolescu.
47. *Künstlerlaunen* (Temperamental Artist) (1920) Dir: Paul Otto; Prod: Vera-Film; Cast: Aud Egede Nissen, Frieda Richard. As Arpad.
48. *Sehnsucht* (Desire) (1920) Dir: F.W. Murnau; Prod: Mosch-Film; Cast: Gussy Holl, Paul Graetz. As the Student.
49. \* *Der Gang in die Nacht* (The Walk in the Night) (1920) Dir: F.W. Murnau; Prod: Goron-Film; Cast: Olaf Fönss, Erna Morena. As the blind painter.
50. *Der Richter von Zalamea* (The Judge from Zalamea) (1920) Dir: Ludwig Berger; Prod: Decla-Film; Cast: Li Dagover, Albert Steinrück.
51. *Christian Wahnschaffe* (1920) Dir: Urban Gad; Prod: Terra-Film; Cast: Fritz Kortner, Werner Krauss, Reinhold Schünzel. As Christian Wahnschaffe.
52. *Menschen im Rausch* (People in Ecstasy) (1920) Dir: Julius Gelsendorfer; Prod: Internationale-Film; Cast: Grete Berger, Gussy Holl. As the Composer.
53. *Die Liebschaften des Hektor Dalmore* (The Love Affairs of Hector Dalmore) (1921) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Erna Morena, Lya de Putli. As Hector Dalmore.
54. *Der Leidensweg der Inge Krafft* (The Suffering of Inge Krafft) (1921) Dir: Robert Dinesen; Prod: May-Film; Cast: Mia May, Albert Steinrück. As Hendryk Overland.
55. *Landstrasse und Grosstadt* (Country Roads and the Big City) (1921) Dir: Carl Wilhelm; Prod: Terra-Film; Cast: Fritz Kortner, Carola Toelle. As Raphael Strate.
56. \* *Das Indische Grabmal* (The Indian Tomb) (1922) Dir: Gunnar Tolines and Joe May; Prod: May-Film; Cast: Mia May, Erna Morena, Olaf Fönss. As Ayan, the Maharajah.
57. *Lady Hamilton* (1922) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Reinhold Schünzel, Werner Krauss, Liane Hald. As Lord Nelson.
58. *Mutterschaftszwang* (Forced Motherhood) (1922) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Reinhold Schünzel, Alfred Abel.
59. \* *Lucrezia Borgia* (1923) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Albert Bassermann, Wilhelm Dieterle, Alexander Granach. As Cesare Borgia.
60. *Paganini* (1923) Dir: Heinz Goldberg; Prod: Veidt-Film; Cast: Eva May, Alexander Granach. As Nicolo Paganini.



61. *Glanz Gegen Glück* (Gold and Luck) (1923) Dir: Adolf Trotz; Prod: Mercator-Film; Cast: Erna Morena, Georg John. As the Count.
62. *Wilhelm Tell* (1923) Dir: Rudolf Dworsky; Prod: AAFA-Film; Cast: Hans Marr, Erna Morena. As Gessler.
63. \**Carlos and Elizabeth* (1924) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Oswald-Film; Cast: Eugen Klöpfer, Wilhelm Dieterle. As King Charles V and Don Carlos (dual role).
64. *Der Film in Film* (1924) (Documentary) Dir: Friedrich Porges; Prod: Deutsches-Fabrikat; Cast: Fritz Lang, Henry Porten, Werner Krauss, other stars and directors. Veidt as himself.
65. \**Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* (The Wax Works) (1924) Dir: Paul Leni; Prod: Neptun-Film; Cast: Emil Jannings, Werner Krauss, Wilhelm Dieterle. As Czar Ivan the Terrible.
66. *Orlacs Hände* (The Hands of Orlac) (1924) (Austria) Dir: Robert Wiene; Prod: Pan-Film; Cast: Alexandra Scrima, Fritz Kortner. As Paul Orlac.
67. \**NJU* (1924) Dir: Paul Czinner; Prod: Primax-Film; Cast: Elizabeth Bergner, Emil Jannings. As the poet.
68. *Ssanin* (1924) Dir: Friedrich Feher; Prod: Vita-Film; Cast: Dagny Servaes.
69. *Schicksal* (Fate) (1924) Dir: Felix Basch; Prod: Messtro-Film; Cast: Lucy Dornale. As Count Wranna.
70. *Le Comte Kostia* (Count Kostia) (1925) (France) Dir: Jacques Robert; Prod: Cine-France; Cast: Andre Nox. As Count Kostia.
71. *Ingmarsarvet* (Ingmar's Inheritance) (1925) (Sweden) Dir: Gustav Mölander; Prod: Nord-West-Film; Cast: Lars Hanson, Mona Martensson. As Helgum.
72. *Liebe Macht Blind* (Love is Blind) (1925) Dir: Lothar Mendes; Prod: UFA; Cast: Lil Dagover, Emil Jannings. As Dr. Lamare.
73. \**Die Brüder Schellenberg* (The Brothers Schellenberg) (1926) Dir: Karl Grüne; Prod: UFA; Cast: Lil Dagover, Liane Haid, Frieda Richard. As the brothers Wenzel and Michael Schellenberg (dual role).
74. \**Der Geiger von Florenz* (The Violinist of Florence) (1926) Dir: Paul Czinner; Prod: UFA; Cast: Elizabeth Bergner, Walter Rilla. As the father.
75. *Dürfen wir Schweigen?* (Should We Be Silent?) (1926) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: Nero-Film; Cast: Fritz Kortner, Walter Rilla, Elga Brink. As Paul Hartwig.
76. *Der Kreuzzug des Weibes* (The Wife's Crusade) (1926) Dir: Martin Berger; Prod: Ziehm-Film; Cast: Werner Krauss, Harry Liedtke. As the Prosecutor.

77. *\*Der Student von Prag* (The Student of Prague) (1926) Dir: Henrik Galeen; Prod: Sokal-Film; Cast: Werner Krauss, Elizza La Porte. As the student, Baldwin.
78. *Enrico I V* (The Flight in the Night) (1926) (Italy) Dir: Amleto Palermi; Prod: Domo/Nero-Film; Cast: Agnes Esterhazy, Angelo Ferrari. As Count Heinrich di Favarl.
79. *\*The Beloved Rogue* (1927) (USA) Dir: Alan Crosland; Prod: United Artists; Cast: John Barrymore, Marceline Day, Silm Summerville. As King Louis XI.
80. *A Man's Past* (1927) (USA) Dir: George Melford; Prod: Universal-Jewel; Cast: Barbara Bedford, Ian Keith. As Paul La Roche.
81. *\*The Man Who Laughs* (1928) (USA) Dir: Paul Leni; Prod: Universal; Cast: Mary Philbin, Olga Baclanova. As Gwynplaine.
82. *\*The Last Performance* (1929) (USA) Dir: Paul Fejos; Prod: Universal-Jewel; Cast: Mary Philbin, Leslie Fenton. As Erik the Great, the Magician.
83. *Wir in Hollywood* (1929) (Documentary) Dir: Arnold Höllriegel; Cast: Chaplin, Lubitsch, Garbo, Jannings, etc. As himself.
84. *Das Land ohne Frauen* (The Land without Women) (1929) Dir: Carmine Gallone; Prod: Tobis-Film; Cast: Elga Brink, Grete Berger. As Dick Ashton.
85. *\*Die Letzte Kompagnie* (The Last Company) (1930) Dir: Kurt Bernhardt; Prod: UFA; Cast: Karin Evans, Alexander Granach. As Captain Burk.
86. *Die Grosse Sehnsucht* (The Great Yearning) (1930) Dir: Stefan Szekely; Prod: Cicero/Tobis-Film; Cast: Camilla Horn, Liane Haid, Lil Dagover. As himself.
87. *Menschen im Käfig* (People in a Cage) (1930) (GB) Dir: E.A. Dupont; Prod: British International; Cast: Tala Birell, Fritz Kortner, Heinrich George. As Gordon Kingsley.
88. *\*Der Mann der Mord Beging* (The Man who Murdered) (1931) Dir: Kurt Bernhardt; Prod: Terra-Film; Cast: Heinrich George, Trude von Molo, Frieda Richard. As Colonel Sevigne, the France Attache.
89. *Die Nacht der Entscheidung* (The Night of Decision) (1931) Dir: Dimitri Buchowetski; Prod: Paramount; Cast: Olga Tschachowa, Peter Voss. As General Platov.
90. *\*Der Kongress Tanzt* (The Congress Dances) (1931) Dir: Erik Charell; Prod: UFA; Cast: Lillian Harvey, Willy Fritsch, Lil Dagover. As Count Metternich.
91. *Die Andere Seite* (The Other Side) (1931) Dir: Heinz Paul; Prod: Cando-Film; Cast: Theodore Loos, Paul Otto. As Captain Stanhope.
92. *Rasputin* (1932) Dir: Adolph Trotz; Prod: Gottschalk-Film; Cast: Paul Otto, Alexandra Sorina. As Rasputin.

93. *\*Der Schwarze Husar* (The Black Hussar) (1932) Dir: Gerhard Lamprecht; Prod: UFA; Cast: Bernhardt Goetzke, Mady Christians, Gregori Chmara. As Rittmeister von Hochberg.
94. *\*FP 1 Antwortet Nicht* (Floating Platform #1 Doesn't Answer) (1932) Dir: Karl Hartl; Prod: UFA; Cast: Jill Esmond, Leslie Fenton, Warwick Ward, Donald Calthrop. As Major Elissen (British version).
95. *\*Ich und die Kaiserin* (I and the Empress) (1932) Dir: Friedrich Hollaender; Prod: UFA; Cast: Mady Christians, Lilian Harvey, Heinz Rühmann. As the Marquis.
96. *\*Rome Express* (1933) (GB) Dir: Walter Forde; Prod: Gaumont-British; Cast: Cedric Hardwicke, Donald Calthrop, Gordon Harker, Esther Ralston. As Zurta.
97. *\*The Wandering Jew* (1933) (GB) Dir: Maurice Elvey; Prod: Gaumont-British; Cast: John Stuart, Marie Ney. As Matathias.
98. *\*I Was a Spy* (1933) (GB) Dir: Victor Saville; Prod: Gaumont-British; Cast: Madeleine Carroll, Herbert Marshall, Edmund Gwenn. As Commandant Obersertz.
99. *\*The Legend of William Tell* (1934) Dir: Heinz Paul; Prod: Terra-Film; Cast: Hans Marr, Emmy Sonnemann. As Gessler.
100. *\*Jew Süß* (1934) (GB) Dir: Lothar Mendes; Prod: Gaumont-British; Cast: Benita Hume, Frank Vosper, Cedric Hardwicke. As Joseph Süß.
101. *Bella Donna* (1934) (GB) Dir: Robert Milton; Prod: Olympic/Twickenham-Film; Cast: Mary Ellis, Cedric Hardwicke. As Mahmoud Baroudi.
102. *\*The Passing of the Third Floor Back* (1935) (GB) Dir: Berthold Viertel; Prod: Gaumont-British; Cast: Rene Ray, Frank Cellier, Anna Lee. As the Stranger.
103. *\*King of the Damned* (1936) (GB) Dir: Walter Forde; Prod: Gaumont-British; Cast: Helen Vinson, Noah Beery. As Convict 83.
104. *\*Under the Red Robe* (1937) (GB) Dir: Victor Seastrom; Prod: 20th Century Fox; Cast: Annabella, Raymond Massey. As Gil de Berault.
105. *\*Dark Journey* (1937) (GB) Dir: Victor Saville; Prod: Korda/London-Film; Cast: Vivien Leigh, Anthony Bushell. As Baron von Marwitz.
106. *Storm Over Asia* (1938) (France) Dir: Richard Oswald; Prod: RIO-Film; Cast: Sessue Hayskawa, Madeleine Robinson, Michiko Tanaka. As Eric Keith.
107. *\*Le Joueur D'Echecs* (The Chess Player) (1938) (France) Dir: Jean Dreville; Prod: Vega-Film; Cast: Francoise Rosay, Micheline Francey. As Baron von Kempelen.

108. *\*The Spy in Black* (1938) (GB) Dir: Michael Powell; Prod: British Columbia; Cast: Sebastian Shaw, Valerie Hobson. As Captain Hardt.
109. *\*The Thief of Bagdad* (1940) (GB) Dir: Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell, Tim Whelan; Prod: Korda/London-Film; Cast: Sabu, June Duprez, John Justin. As Jaffar.
110. *\*Contraband* (in US: *Blackout*) (1940) (GB) Dir: Michael Powell; Prod: British National; Cast: Valerie Hobson, Hay Petrie. As Captain Andersen.
111. *\*Escape* (1940) (USA) Dir: Mervyn LeRoy; Prod: MGM; Cast: Norma Shearer, Robert Taylor, Albert Bassermann. As General von Kolb.
112. *\*A Woman's Face* (1941) (USA) Dir: George Cukor; Prod: MGM; Cast: Joan Crawford, Melvyn Douglas, Albert Bassermann. As Torsten Barring.
113. *\*Whistling in the Dark* (1941) (USA) Dir: S. Sylvan Simon; Prod: MGM; Cast: Red Skelton, Eve Arden. As Joseph Jones.
114. *\*The Men in Her Life* (1941) (USA) Dir: Gregory Ratoff; Prod: Columbia; Cast: Loretta Young, Dean Jagger, John Sheppard. As Stanislaus Rosing.
115. *\*All through the Night* (1941) (USA) Dir: Vincent Sherman; Prod: Warner Brothers; Cast: Humphrey Bogart, Peter Lorre, Kaaren Verne. As Ebbing.
116. *\*Nazi Agent* (1942) (USA) Dir: Jules Dassin; Prod: MGM; Cast: Ann Ayars, Martin Kosleck. As Otto Becker/Baron von Dettner (dual role).
117. *\*Casablanca* (1942) (USA) Dir: Michael Curtiz; Prod: Warner Brothers; Cast: Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid, Peter Lorre, Claude Rains. As Major Strasser.
118. *\*Above Suspicion* (1943) (USA) Dir: Richard Thorpe; Prod: MGM; Cast: Joan Crawford, Fred MacMurray, Basil Rathbone. As Count Hassert Seidel.

*\*Asterisk denotes those Veidt films of which copies are still extant today.*

## A Partial Listing of Plays from Veldt's Stage Career

*The location of these plays was Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater in Berlin, unless otherwise noted.*

DATE	Title of play, author, other cast members, Veldt's role
1913	<i>Der Arzt am Scheldeweg</i> , by G.B. Shaw, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veldt as a writer.
1913	<i>Faust</i> , part 2, by Johann Goethe, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veldt as Rausbold.
1913	<i>Pantheïsma</i> , by Heinrich von Kleist, directed by Felix Hollaender, Veldt as Antilochus.
1913	<i>Der Verlorene Sohn</i> , by Wilhelm Schmidtbonn, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veldt as Pun.
1913	<i>Androcles and the Lion</i> , by G.B. Shaw, directed by Richard Ordynski, Veldt as Secutor.
1914	<i>Frühlingserwachen</i> , by Frank Wedekind, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veldt as Uncle Probst.
1914	<i>Die Räuber</i> , by Johann Schiller, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veldt as Schweizer.
1914	<i>Ein Sommernachts Traum</i> , by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veldt as Philostrate.
1914	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> , by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veldt as Leonardo.
1914	<i>King Lear</i> , by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veldt as Herald.
1914	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veldt as Benvolio.
1914	<i>Henry IV</i> , by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veldt as Archibald.
1914	<i>As You Like It</i> , by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veldt as Valentin.
1914	<i>Freiheit</i> , by Max Halbe, directed by Eduard von Winterstein, Veldt as Beyle.

- 1914 *Othello*, by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as the third nobleman.
- 1914 *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*, by Heinrich von Kleist, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Stranz.
- 1914 *Das Alte Spiel von Jedermann*, by H. von Hofmannstahl, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Guter Gesell.
- 1914 *Wallensteins Lager*, by Johann Schiller, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Dragoner.
- 1914 *Wallensteins Tod* (Nov. 13), by Johann Schiller, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Neumann.
- 1914 *Die Piccolomini* (Oct. 9), by Johann Schiller, directed by Max Reinhardt, with Albert Bassermann, Veidt as Don Maradas.
- 1914 *Genoveva*, by Friedrich Hebbel, directed by Felix Hollaender, Veidt as Ritter Hildebrandt.
- 1914 *Die Versuchung des Diogenes* (The Temptation of Diogenes), by Wilhelm Schmidtbonn.
- 1916 A comedy entitled *Goldfish* was presented at the Front Theater at Libau (Jun. 25), co-starring Veidt and Lucie Mannheim, directed by Josef Dischner.
- 1916 *Hamlet*, by Shakespeare, director unknown, Veidt as Bernardo.
- 1916 *Maria Stuart*, by Johann Schiller, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Believe.
- 1916 *Nachtasy*, by Maxim Gorki, directed by Richard Vallentin, Veidt as a Tartar.
- 1916 *Dantons Tod*, by Georg Büchner, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Philippeau.
- 1916 *Der Schnellmaler oder Kunst und Mammon*, by Frank Wedekind, director unknown, Veidt as the Police Commissioner.
- 1917 *Macbeth*, by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Lenox.
- 1917 *Judith*, by Friedrich Hebbel, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Achior.

- 1917 *As You Like It*, by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Antonio.
- 1917 *Othello*, by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Lodovico.
- 1917 *Das Mirakel*, by K.G. von Vollmoeller, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Ritter.
- 1917 *Die Orestie*, by Aichylos, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as a herald.
- 1917 *Das Wintermärchen*, by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Camillo.
- 1917 *Oedipus Rex*, by Sophocles.
- 1917 *Edelwild*, by Emil Gött, at the Volksbühne Theater, Berlin.
- 1917 *Master Olof*, by August Strindberg.
- 1917 *The Lower Depths*, by Maxim Gorki, Veidt as the Tartar.
- 1917 *The Suffering Woman*, by Carl von Sternheim.
- 1917 *The Little Napoleon*, by Mischa Cornelius.
- 1918 *The Fatherland*, by Maxmillian Boettcher.
- 1918 *Die Koralle*, by Georg Kaiser, directed by Felix Hollaender, Veidt as the priest.
- 1918 *Ein Sommernachtstraum*, by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Theseus.
- 1918 *Das Alte Spiel von Jedermann*, by H. von Hofmannstahl, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Death.
- 1918 *Die Hermannsschlacht*, by Heinrich von Kleist, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Ariston.
- 1918 *Hanneles Himmelfahrt*, by Gerhard Hauptmann, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as the Angel of Death.
- 1918 *Seeschlacht*, by Reinhard Goering, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as a sailor.
- 1918 *Sumurun*, by Friedrich Freksa, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Nur al Din.
- 1918 *King Lear*, by Shakespeare, directed by Carl Heine, Veidt as Edgar.

- 1918 *Der Besuch aus dem Elysium*, by Franz Werfel, directed by Heinz Herald, Veidt as Markus.
- 1918 *Clavigo*, by Johann Goethe, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Clavigo.
- 1918 *The Merchant of Venice*, by Shakespeare, directed by Max Reinhardt, Veidt as Antonio.
- 1918 *Der Schöpfer* (Nov. 19), by Hans Müller, with Albert Bassermann as the star of the play and Veidt in a small role.
- 1919 *Dies Irae*, by Anton Wildgans, Lessing Theater, Berlin.
- 1919 *Grünem Kakadu*, by Artur Schnitzler, Volksbühne Theater, Berlin.
- 1920 *The Marquis of Arcis*, by Carl von Sternheim, Volksbühne Theater, Berlin.
- 1921 *Der Lasterhafte Herr Tschu*, by Julius Berstl, Lessing Theater, Berlin, with Alexander Granach and Elizabeth Bergner, Veidt in the role of the Mandarin. (Oct. 18)
- 1922 *Outward Bound*, by Sutton Vane, Tribune Theater, Berlin, Veidt as the Drunkard.
- 1922 *Eiga*, by Gerhard Hauptmann, Volksbühne Theater, Berlin, with Tilla Durlaux.
- 1923 *Der Flieger*, by Hermann Rossman, Deutsches Volkstheater, Vienna, Veidt as Oberleutenant Frank.
- 1929 *The Marquis of Keith*, by Frank Wedekind, Staats-Theater, Berlin, with Elizabeth Bergner, Fritz Kortner, Heinrich George, Veidt as the composer.



1929     *Lul*, by Alfred Savoir.

1930     *He (Er)*, by Alfred Savoir, Tribune Theater, Berlin, Veidt in the title role of He.

**Date unknown:**

*Salome*, by Oscar Wilde, with Maria Orska, Veidt as John the Baptist.

*Käthchen von Heilbronn*, by Heinrich von Kleist.

*The Great Galeoto*, by Jose Echegaray, Residenz Theater, Munich, Veidt as Ernest.

*Ein Hut, ein Mantel, ein Handschuh*, by Wilhelm Speyer, directed by Rolf Jahn, a crime play staged at the Deutsches Volkstheater, Vienna, Veidt in the leading role.

## Bibliography

- Barrymore, Ethel. Interview. *New York Post*, June 7, 1956.
- Bergner, Elizabeth. *Bewundert viel und viel gescholten*. C. Bertelsmann Verlag. 1978.
- Billington, Michael. *The Modern Actor*, Hamilton Publishing Co. 1973.
- Cross, Robin. Career article on Conrad Veidt in *The Movie Star's Story*, by Robyn Karney. Crescent Books. 1986.
- Crowther, Bosley. Column. *New York Times*. June 13, 1942.
- Danischewsky, M. *Michael Balcon's 25 Years in Film*. World Film Pub. 1947.
- Engelmann, Bernd. In *Hitler's Germany*. Random House. 1986.
- Essoe, Gabe. "Charles Champlin's 16 All-Time Best Films." From *The Book of Movie Lists*. Arlington House. 1981.
- Fraser, George MacDonald. *The Hollywood History of the World*. William Morrow Co. 1988.
- Freedland, Michael. *The Warner Brothers*. St. Martin's Press. 1983.
- Gammie, John. "An Appreciation of Conrad Veidt—Great Actor." In *Film Magazine*. England. May 4, 1934.
- Halliwell, Leslie. *The Filmgoer's Companion*. Hill and Wang Co. 1977.
- Heine, Heinrich. *Die Romantische Schule*. 1833.
- Higham, Charles and Moseley, Ray. *Princess Merle*. Pocket Books. 1985.
- Ickes, Paul. *Conrad Veidt, ein Buch vom Wesen und Werden eines Künstlers*. Filmschriften Verlag. Berlin. 1927.
- Kobal, John. *People Will Talk*. Interview in book. Knopf Co. 1985.
- Koch, Howard. *Casablanca*. Overlook Press. 1973.
- Lambert, Gavin. *Norma Shearer*. Knopf Co. 1990.

- Lee, Christopher. *Tall, Dark, and Gruesome*. W.H. Allen Co. 1977.
- Maltin, Leonard. *TV Movie and Video Guide*. New American Library. 1987.
- Meyer, William R. *Warner Brothers Directors*. Arlington House. 1978.
- Morley, Robert. *Robert Morley, A Reluctant Autobiography*. Simon and Schuster Co. 1966.
- O'Leary, Liam. *The Silent Cinema*. Dutton Co. 1965.
- Powell, Michael. *A Life in the Movies*. Knopf Co. 1987.
- Ramin, Robert. *Conrad Veidt, ein Leben für den Film*. Verlag Scherl. Berlin. 1933.
- Raynor, Vivien. Article in *Connoisseur Magazine*. March. 1986.
- Riley, James Whitcomb. Excerpt from poem, *He Is Not Dead*. From his book, *Away*. Bobbs Merrill Publ. Co. 1933.
- Shipman, David. *The Great Movie Stars: The Golden Years*. Hill and Wang Publ. 1981.
- Veidt, Conrad. Article, *Living my parts*. *Picturegoer Magazine*. England. 3 Sept., 1932.
- Viertel, Salka. *The Kindness of Strangers*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Co. 1969.

# Index

- Albers, Hans, 174  
 Bassermann, Albert, 24, 27, 29, 51, 199, 289, 290, 298  
 Berger, Ludwig, 25, 93, 270  
 Bergner, Elizabeth, 67, 283  
 Blumenreich, Albert, 12, 13, 25  
 Barmore, John, 84, 103-107  
 Boyer, Charles, 174, 293  
 Bacon, Michael, 198, 211, 214, 251  
 Bamowsky, Victor, 28, 59  
 Berber, Anita, 76  
 Bacanova, Olga, 113, 114  
 Billington, Michael, 285  
 Chaplin, Charlie, 30, 126, 153, 154  
 Cooper, Gary, 120, 131, 132  
 Churchill, Winston, 205  
 Curtiz, Michael, 327, 328  
 Christians, Mady, 25  
 Dischner, Josef, 20, 22, 23  
 Dietrich, Marlene, 33  
 Dietrich, William, 33  
 Dagover, Li, 47, 134  
 Dymow, Ossip, 165  
 Einstein, Albert, 214  
 Engel, Fritz, 25  
 Fraenkel, Heinrich, 27, 28  
 Freund, Karl, 32  
 Feher, Friedrich, 47  
 Fenton, Leslie, 120  
 Feuchtwanger, Lion, 208  
 Granach, Alexander, 24, 28, 67  
 George, Heinrich, 33, 191, 192  
 Goebbels, Paul, 182, 183, 185, 186, 196, 207, 210, 220, 225  
 Garbo, Greta, 119  
 Goldwyn, Sam, 110  
 Goering, Hermann, 216  
 Hirschfeld, Magnus, 38  
 Holl, Gussy, 42, 43, 113  
 Hitler, Adolf, 180, 184, 210  
 Harvey, Lilian, 244, 245  
 Henneke, Payl, 320, 321  
 Homolka, Oscar, 33  
 Jennings, Emil, 24, 27, 43, 51, 59, 93, 95, 111, 113, 123, 191, 192, 217, 283  
 Jacobson, Siegfried, 25  
 Jaeger, Ernst, 136  
 Janowitz, Hans, 47, 48, 53  
 Jessner, Leopold, 28  
 Krauss, Werner, 33, 47, 51, 191, 192  
 Korda, Alexander, 233, 251, 270  
 Kane, Robert, 115, 116  
 Kohner, Paul, 299  
 Kafka, Hans, 340  
 Lubitsch, Ernst, 25, 27, 111, 299  
 Leni, Paul, 136  
 Laemmle, Carl Sr., 102, 108-110, 122, 129  
 Laughton, Charles, 252  
 Langer, Gilda, 36, 51  
 Lugosi, Bela, 68  
 Lorant, Stefan, 183  
 Lukas, Paul, 289  
 Messter, Oskar, 27, 30, 31, 35  
 Mannheim, Lucia, 18, 20, 22, 24  
 Mumau, F.W., 25, 27, 58, 166  
 Moissi, Alexander, 25  
 Maenz, Anna, 26  
 Morris, Mary, 273  
 May, Joe, 292  
 May, Mia, 292  
 Mayer, Carl, 47, 48  
 Mendes, Lothar, 27  
 Mayer, Louis B., 287, 288, 295  
 Morley, Robert, 229  
 Nielsen, Asta, 65  
 Niemoeller, Martin, 182  
 Oswald, Richard, 27, 30, 32, 36, 38, 57, 86, 260  
 Pommer, Erich, 27, 47, 51, 93  
 Porges, Friedrich, 27, 28, 82  
 Pressburger, Emmerich, 279, 287  
 Powell, Michael, 256, 257, 279, 283, 287  
 Reinhardt, Max, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 27, 28, 57, 113  
 Reinhardt, Edmund, 22, 24  
 Rathbone, Basil, 291  
 Rainer, Luise, 171  
 Rado, Ivan, 340  
 Richardson, Ralph, 26  
 Schildkraut, Joseph, 25, 121  
 Schünzel, Reinhold, 33, 36, 51  
 Siller, Mauritz, 119  
 Schildkraut, Rudolf, 27, 121  
 Steinrück, Albert, 133  
 Shipman, David, 282  
 Shearer, Norman, 295  
 Trevor, Jack, 28, 138  
 Veidt, Amalie, 4-6, 24, 70  
 Veidt, Felicitas, 77-80, 90, 107, 122, 125, 138, 143, 145-146, 150-153, 156-157, 167, 169  
 Veidt, Karl, 4, 6  
 Veidt, Lily, 141, 187, 188, 189, 195, 197, 200, 201, 290, 291  
 Veidt, Philipp, 4-6, 13, 24, 26  
 Veidt, Viola, 6, 78, 90-91, 122, 128, 130, 133, 138, 143, 145-146, 148, 150-157, 166-167, 169-171, 181, 187, 193-194, 203, 238, 267, 268, 269, 306, 328-331  
 Viertel, Salika, 224, 299  
 Wegener, Paul, 24, 27, 51, 74, 191  
 Wiene, Robert, 31, 35, 46, 51  
 Wilder, Billy, 293, 339  
 Wigram, Olive, 290, 291









**"An affectionate tribute to a great actor . . ."**



Conrad Veidt was a marvelous character actor and leading man in films from Germany, Austria, Sweden, Italy, France, England, and the United States. The legendary veteran of over 100 films, Conrad Veidt has delighted and thrilled audiences of all ages in films from both the silent era and the golden age—from *Caligari* to *Casablanca*. Yet, somehow, for none of these varied and convincing roles has Conrad Veidt been honored with accolades the likes of which are regularly bestowed on those stars who perfect *one* fashionable persona.

*Conrad Veidt, From Caligari to Casablanca* chronicles the life and work of this distinguished international star of stage and screen. Conrad Veidt was a man of charm and ability, respected and admired by persons on both sides of the camera lens. Mr. Allen's well researched account and 160 rare photographs document Veidt's considerable contribution to his craft.

This sensitive tribute to a truly memorable movie stalwart is a *must* for all film buffs and serious students of film history, and will be intriguing reading for anyone interested in the legitimate theater or motion pictures.

ISBN: 0-940168-27-8